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GENERAL FOCH  
AT THE  
MARNE



CHARLES LE GOFFIC



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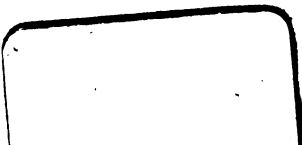


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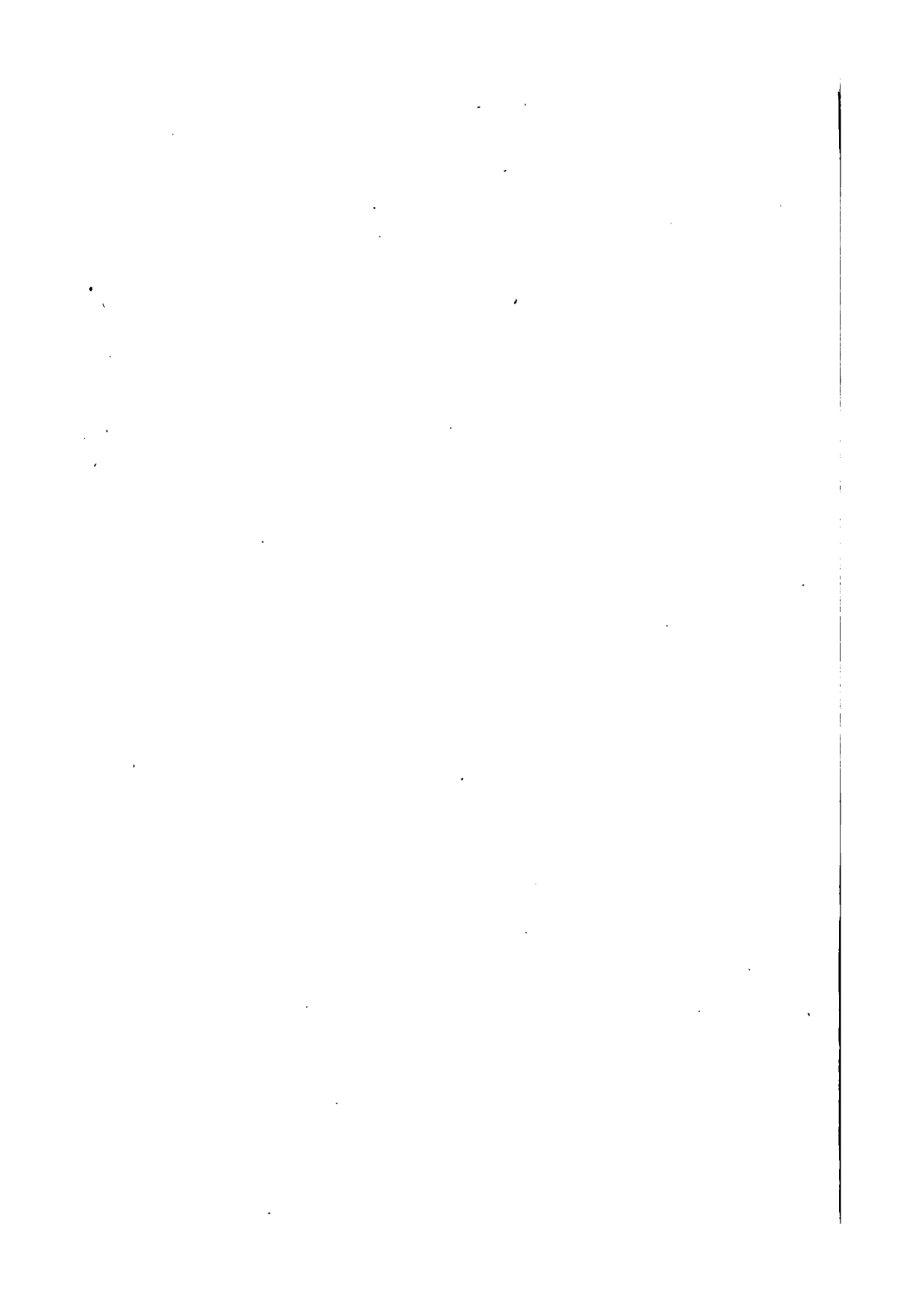
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AT THE MARNE**

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GENERAL FOCH

# GENERAL FOCH AT THE MARNE

AN ACCOUNT OF THE FIGHTING IN  
AND NEAR THE MARSHES  
OF SAINT-GOND

BY

CHARLES LE GOFFIC



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

LUCY MENZIES

1918

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

M. LE GOFFIC'S book entitled *Les Marais de Saint-Gond* deals with the six days' fighting which immediately succeeded the arrest of the French retreat, when the French soldiers were at last allowed to turn round and fight the all-conquering Germans, before whom, for strategic as well as for more obvious reasons, they had been forced to retreat during many bitter days and nights. Heavy sacrifices had been demanded of these men; "that even when victorious they should retreat, that they should hold partial successes as nothing, that they should possess their souls in patience. . . . They had been told that they were making a strategic retreat. They believed it at first, but the more the retreat was prolonged, the more suspicion crept in . . . and in these last days their hearts had been sick within them at the thought of the great tracts of their own country they had been forced to cede to the enemy"—and that without striking a blow in their defence.

An outstanding feature of the Battle of the Marne was General Foch's masterly handling of the Ninth Army. Ferdinand Foch was born at Metz in 1852, and was therefore only a young student at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war. He was educated in Paris at the *École Polytechnique*—the Woolwich of France—and according to the law of the French Army, had to serve as a private before he could pass the examination qualifying for a commission. Promotion in the French Army is, in the lower ranks, partly by seniority and

partly by selection, but after the rank of major it is by selection alone. Only the best men, therefore, come to the front. For service on the staff, a further course at the *École Supérieure de la Guerre* is followed by two years' probation on the staff of some branch of the army other than that of the candidate's own unit. These tests being duly passed, the time of the staff officer is divided between his own unit and service on the staff, but every promotion must be preceded by two years' service with his own unit. So that the staff of 1914 was—very different from the staff of 1870—in touch with every part of that vast organisation, the Army of France.

On the outbreak of war Foch was a corps commander. He was already well known to students of military strategy as one of a brilliant group of French officers whose writings, "inspired by the theories and practice of Napoleon, were among the most striking evidences of the renaissance of the French Army." Foch was a professor at the staff college, the *École Supérieure de la Guerre*, and he was the author of several standard books on tactics and strategy, *Les Principes de la Guerre*, *De la Conduite de la Guerre*, etc. When General Joffre formed part of his reserves into a new army, the Ninth, he gave the command of it to Foch, whose merits he had been quick to recognise—that "short, quick-moving, clear-glanced soldier" of the grey-blue eyes, who was also a scientist and a philosopher. Already master of the science of war, he was to translate the strategy of the text-book into achievement on the battlefield. And with his absolute mastery of technique he combined a faculty for taking a wide grasp of a situation, a quick perception, and a genius for co-

ordination. "But his greatest virtue," writes M. le Goffic, "was his tenacity, a 'calculated tenacity.' And yet that would not have been enough without his marvellous gifts both as a technical expert and a soldier, which allowed him to vary, according to circumstances, the tactical opportunities of the units engaged, to invent every day a new disposition for his troops. This fertility of resource, this fine sense of manœuvre, these perpetual rebounds—these are what constitute true military genius."

As an example of almost prophetic foresight, a quotation from Foch's Preface to *De la Conduite de la Guerre*, written in 1904, is full of interest to-day and explains much of the success we have come to expect from the forces under his command.

"For many well-known and self-evident reasons," he wrote, "armies of the present day are condemned to long periods of peace. Now and again at long intervals they may be sent on an expedition against the black races of Africa or the yellow races of Asia: but there one has to war rather against disease, against climate, against difficulties of victualling and transport, than against an organised enemy. The life of the nation with all its diverse activities—commerce, industry and so on—is hardly modified at all by such distant expeditions.

"Then all of a sudden, Europe finds itself shaken to its foundations. Extreme tension is set up on every side. Dark clouds appear on the horizon. The storm breaks. It is war on a gigantic scale: terrible in its beginnings, tragic in its results.

"Faced by such a situation, so deeply charged with consequences, public opinion is troubled, bewildered.

Anxiety is all the greater that the whole nation is torn from its peaceful occupations to try its fortune by arms, to demand of arms its destiny. And a nation will not brook deception. It demands victory from its officers, from its staff, from its commander-in-chief. Are they really prepared ? Are they ready ?

“ For years they have devoted meticulous care to the administration, feeding, clothing, instructing of their army : have they also prepared for the activities of war ? Are the officers trained to form rapid appreciations and judgments of situations, as well as in the conduct of the various operations of war ? In the long intervals of peace, when the army was diverted from war, that ‘ terrible and passionate drama,’ the real purpose of its existence—has it become antiquated and useless ?

“ In order to keep the brain of an army tuned up to its highest pitch, working at its keenest activity, to keep it—in time of peace—constantly focussed on war, nothing is more important, more charged with useful lessons, than the study of history.

“ For war, regarded on its highest level, is the conflict between two wills, more or less powerful and enlightened : the justice of its decisions is still governed by the same considerations as in the past : the same mistakes are still to be recognised, leading to the same defeats : the art of military strategy is still drawn from the same sources.

“ It is from this point of view that the present study has been undertaken. It has been attempted, in particular, to reconstruct the spirit and activities of the various headquarters. ‘ He who would understand the art of war must set himself to understand those who

## Translator's Preface ix

make war. It is in the headquarters that the key to military history is to be found' (York de Wartenburg).

"And reflecting on the dark days of 1870 in the light of this advice, one is not afraid to reiterate yet once again : *In memoriam : in spem.*"

One cannot but be attracted by the personality of General Foch, "whose life has been devoted to translating philosophy into the terms of the casualty list, whose speech, by its logical precision betrays the mathematician, by its rapidity the man of action." He is the living exponent of his own gospel—the development, from a military point of view, of spirit and character, a development constantly maintained in the light of the highest ideals of Duty : he has trained himself to see things in their true perspective, he has the intuition of the born leader and that technical mastery which guarantees the accomplishment of any operation he decides to undertake. This is amply proved by his record of the last four years, at Nancy, on the Marne, at Ypres—where after a gas-attack the British owed much to Foch's support—in Flanders, in Artois, and in the Somme offensive of 1916. In all these operations he showed brilliant qualities, but it was on the Marne that he achieved the most striking results. Under circumstances full of dread anxiety to the ordinary mind, as, for example, when his right wing had been driven back, when an important position had been lost, Foch is to be found calm and serene, able to issue a confident and reassuring bulletin, "Situation excellent : offensive to be vigorously prosecuted." He is ready, from his expert knowledge, to undertake the most audacious of manœuvres : he knows his men, he knows that he can demand of them,



even when wearied with many days' fighting, with want of sleep, want of food, not only that their old positions shall be held at all costs, but that new positions shall be taken. For according to General Foch, "to hold positions is to prepare implicitly for defeat, if nothing further is attempted, if the offensive is not immediately assumed." It is easy to understand with what strength and confidence such a leader inspires his men. They know he will not demand the impossible from them, that what he does demand is therefore within their powers. He takes them into his confidence. "It is necessary," he once said to them, "either to kill these Prussians or to conquer them." And the Bretons he was speaking to replied simply, "Very good," as much as to say, It shall be done. All onslaughts of the enemy seem powerless to disturb the calm serenity and confidence of the "imperturbable Foch." In face of a particularly violent attack, he would explain it to his staff. "Bah," he would say, "when the enemy attacks us so furiously, it is because he is desperate, because things are going badly with him elsewhere and he is seeking compensation." His optimistic philosophy carries him still further, for he holds that it is *morally* that battles are lost and won. "A battle lost," he says, "is a battle which one has expected to lose," and conversely, "a battle gained is a battle which one has expected to gain, in which one will not admit oneself defeated." And in reading M. le Goffic's account of the swaying fortunes of the Battle of the Marne, one is inclined to agree that Foch won the battle simply because he would not admit himself defeated, because he believed always that he *could* win it. Even when forced for three successive days to retire, he renewed

## Translator's Preface xi

the offensive each morning, and finally when the enemy made one false step, Foch fell on him with lightning rapidity, because his intuition had led him to foresee the movements of the enemy, to summon another division to his aid, which he was thus able to throw into the battle at the psychological moment. General Joffre had brought up the Ninth Army as one of his reserves, and the fact that the German position was deteriorating while that of France was improving, is borne out here in a striking way. For it was into the gap left in the German lines by the withdrawal of troops from von Hausen's Saxons, and from von Bülow's army, that Foch drove the wedge of the Ninth Army. "This fine manœuvre," says M. le Goffic, "has been regarded as the decisive action which determined the fate of the battle—or, at least, precipitated that fate." It is probable that von Bülow's retreat had already begun, but there is no doubt that Foch's manœuvre hastened it and made it partake of the nature of a catastrophe. It was during this retreat that the Prussian Guard, hurrying across the Marshes of Saint-Gond, was said to have left both men and guns in their deadly embrace. That was the legend. But the reality was even finer than the legend. "That which was swallowed up in the marshes, that which foundered definitely in their green depths, was more than a few crack battalions—it was the prestige of the German army and of its pretended invincibility."

In an English edition of this book it may not be superfluous to give the reader some idea of the position of the Marshes of Saint-Gond and of their surroundings. The Champagne-Pouilleuse, over which much of

these six days' fighting took place, lies east of the Forest of the Argonne. It is a vast plain, "like a petrified ocean, where for forty miles from east to west, and for more than a hundred from north to south, stretch these dreary steppes, where heaths and chalky moorlands are broken by patches of crop, by shapeless coppices, and by large new plantings of little firs . . . on whose melancholy levels it has for a thousand years been prophesied that the Armageddon of Europe would be fought." <sup>1</sup>

To the east again of these vast flats rises the plateau of Sézanne, with the deep valley of the Marne running through it. "In the chalky soil of the Sézanne plateau lies a pocket of clay, ten miles long from east to west, and of a breadth varying from one to two miles. Through this pocket flows the Petit-Morin, now a very small stream; indeed, here lie its springs, and it and its affluents have been canalised to prevent flooding. The clay pocket is called the Marshes of Saint-Gond; they are now almost wholly reclaimed, and between acres of rank grass the various rivulets run in deep ditches. . . . In fine weather the place is dry enough"—the cultivated parts at least—"but in heavy rains the clay soil of the marshes becomes one vast quagmire." <sup>2</sup>

M. le Goffic deals only with the battle as seen from a small corner of the marshes—there is, therefore, no mention of the part played by the British in the victory. It was no small part. Von Klück's disdain for the British, to which he openly left his flank uncovered as if no danger was to be feared from so small an army, led to his flank being turned and so to his

<sup>1</sup> Buchan, *History of the War*, vol. ii. p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 169.

## Translator's Preface xiii

retreat. The British Army was fighting beyond and in liaison with the Fifth French Army, commanded by General Franchet d'Espérey, whose name figures often in these pages.

When all is said and done, the Victory of the Marne has in it still something of the mysterious, the inexplicable. All through M. le Goffic's narrative we see the waves of inspiration on which these French soldiers were uplifted and borne irresistibly forward. In reading the moving account of the charge at Coizard, where M. de Beaufort rushed forward at the head of his battalion crying, "Forward, my lads! Courage! It is for France! Joan of Arc is with us!" one cannot but remember that the Maid led her soldiers over this very part of France, that these men were fighting not so far from Domremy, from her home, where voices from an unseen world had come to urge her to great deeds for France. And one wonders if perhaps the vast, wide flats of Champagne, the haunting mystery of the marshes, brought the same message, the same war-like mysticism to these brave soldiers, leading them to lay their lives gladly down for France—to prove themselves no unworthy compatriots of the Maid.

L. M.

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**TO MY COUSIN**  
**COLONEL VICTOR LETULLE**

## GENERAL FOCH AT THE MARNE

### THE MARSHES OF SAINT-GOND

IN the early days of July, 1916, I was stationed at Villevenard, a little village of three hundred inhabitants on the edge of the Marshes of Saint-Gond. That district is not over-melancholy: the war has tried it but little. The roofs of some houses have been damaged by bombs, but they were French bombs and did as little damage as possible. The great devastation is elsewhere, on the other side of the Petit-Morin, where German shells rained down on Reuves, Oyes, Broussy, Bannes, and so on. The mere skeletons of these villages which encircle the marshes made Villevenard seem almost cheerful in comparison; even the church—a beautiful example of Roman architecture, as are most of the churches of this neighbourhood—has hardly suffered at all from the bombardment. And at the *Mairie*, after the departure of the German troops, M. Roland, the schoolmaster, who is also a keen excavator, found his collection of prehistoric and Gallo-Roman antiquities intact, and in the order in which he had classified them, with the exception of the gold and silver articles which had been stolen.



I spent many hours in that little museum, of which even more important places might well be proud. The history of the marshes may be better learned there than from books. Between two discussions on pre-historic flint implements and the curves of sea-shells of the Eocene formation,<sup>1</sup> M. Roland told me his personal experiences of the invasion. He had kept a journal of everything that happened at Villevenard from the 3rd till the 12th of September, 1914. He also told me of other sources of information which I could follow out in the neighbouring villages if I wished. I think he would even have liked to introduce me to the Abbé Millard, the last hermit of Saint-Gond, an indulgent ecclesiastic and a historian of high rank.

I was already acquainted with the history of Saint-Gond, for I had read an old book by the Seigneur of Breuvery, where it is stated that the Priory of Saint-Gond or Gaond, two leagues from Sézanne and formerly called Saint - Pierre - en - Oyes, was a fine abbey founded by the saint about 660. Gond was a nephew of Vaudregesil, a mayor of the palace, and was related to King Dagobert, who brought him up in the same eminent piety which he himself professed. They both forsook the court in 654, under the reign of Clovis II., and retired to a place called Fontenelle, whence Gond, on the death of his uncle, and after having dwelt in many places, betook himself to another district called Oyes—" a beautiful valley, abounding in

<sup>1</sup> What is known by geologists as the French Eocene basin is rich in flints and fossils, and these M. Roland had apparently been excavating from the caves near Villevenard. (Translator's Note.)

## The Marshes of Saint-Gond 3

meadows, richly wooded, encircled by low-lying hills and presenting a veritable solitude." Gond built a church at this place which he dedicated to St. Peter, also little cells for himself and those religious who were with him.

Such was the origin of the abbey, converted later into the priory which has given its name to the marshes. Must I confess that at first sight the marshes disappointed me a little? They are longer than broad, and one cannot appreciate their full extent except from the buttresses of Saint-Prix or the heights of Mont-Août. Although it is not altogether correct to describe the valley, in the words of the Seigneur of Breuvery, as "very beautiful," it is at least true that there is nothing rugged in its nature. I longed, in spite of myself, for certain marshes in Brittany, and especially for those of Yunn with their wonderful depth of feeling. What a strange region that is! No fields, no trees, no houses, nothing but solitude in all its nakedness, except towards Botmeur with its narrow strip of green pasture-land. Life there seems to be still in its most primitive stage. Were it not for the pickaxes of the quarrymen and the melancholy cries of the little herdsmen of Arrhée, who call from one mountain to another while pasturing their flocks on these slopes, one might imagine oneself on a planet still in state of formation. And that curious Sabbath-stillness which seems to cling to the barren hill-tops of Yunn, hills which overtop each other towards the horizon—which seem to be ruffled up by the wind like a petrified mane! . . .

Here there is nothing of that sort. We are on the borders of Brie and Champagne. Under a sky of powerfully modelled clouds we see a land of precise angles and carefully designed divisions, a realism naturally enforced by the direction of the sun and the disposition of the waters. The marshes themselves dry up from year to year. Large tracts of them have already been reclaimed by cultivation along their borders. And in addition, straight lines of tall poplars along the highroads and the banks of the Petit-Morin intersect them diagonally, cut them up, divide them into sections, and give them a certain geometrical character. Here is none of that vague infinitude of reeds and rushes which makes so powerfully for the romantic. But at certain hours in the evening the marshes seem to dilate under the mist; indeed even during the day an air of mystery seems to haunt them.

History, if not poetry, hangs around them. Three great human avalanches have come to expire on their banks. They saw the first convulsions of Attila. They closed over the last hurrahs of the soldiers of Marie-Louise, when the remnants of Pachtod's army, fleeing from the "tempest of horses" which surrounded and fought them on all sides, rather than surrender, threw themselves living into the marshes which swallowed them up.<sup>1</sup> And in September, 1914, the Prussian Guard

<sup>1</sup> The soldiers of Marie-Louise were the conscripts of 1814, probably so called after the Empress. They were commanded by Generals Pachtod and Amey, when, on March 25, 1814, they were overwhelmed at Fère-Champenoise by the troops of Blücher and Schwartzberg. It was while attempting to escape from these forces that—rather than surrender—they threw themselves with one last Hurrah! into the marshes. (Translator's Note.)

## The Marshes of Saint-Gond 5

in its turn left its prestige there. One might therefore expect the nights on the marshes to palpitate—full of tragic shadows. But when I climbed up the slopes of Chenaille at the darkening, by the little footpaths through the vineyards, I felt no presentiment of fear or dread. The marshes lay sleeping peacefully beneath the moon. The croak of a solitary frog was the only sound to be heard over these vast flats. Ruins bear witness to the war even here, but Nature's gentle hand is already effacing the scars.

I set myself first of all to examine these ruins. I had brought some books with me,<sup>1</sup> notably the *Bataille de la Marne*, by Gustave Babin, the best and most accurate of guides. The books explained the places; the places in their turn served as commentaries on the accounts of the historians. Once or twice they contradicted each other.

Such was the dictation to which the following pages

<sup>1</sup> Books, brochures and articles : *La Guerre en Champagne*, published under the direction of Mgr. Tissier, Bishop of Chalons ; *Mondement*, by Asker ; *Au centre de la bataille de la Marne*, by L. Néret ; *La Guerre sur le front occidental*, by Joseph Reinach ; *De Liège à la Marne*, by Pierre Dauzet ; *Les Batailles de la Marne*, by P. Fabreguettes ; *Les Champs de Bataille de la Marne*, by Gervais-Courtellemont ; *Paysages de Guerre*, by Gabriel Faure ; *Visions de Guerre*, by Florian-Parmentier. I must also acknowledge the help I have received from private notebooks, letters, and communications by word of mouth, all of which were most kindly put at my disposal, and by whose aid I set myself to disentangle a particularly confused subject, to put generalities aside and enter into details. Without such help it is clear that I could never have written a book which aims at a certain precision, and which is the first book of this kind—dealing with the central part of the operations of the Marne—which has been offered to the public.

were written. They have no military pretensions ; they may even bring a smile to the face of the professional soldier ; they describe the battle as seen by a civilian from a small corner of the marshes whence he tried to construct for himself some idea as to the course of events in the centre of the French line. In the almost complete absence of official documents, the historian of to-day has now more than ever to content himself with the approximate truth.

# The Preliminaries of the Battle 7

## I

### THE PRELIMINARIES OF THE BATTLE

ON the morning of September 3, 1914, the inhabitants of the villages which lie round the Marshes of Saint-Gond heard the roar of cannon for the first time from the direction of Vervins. The battle was drawing near. The enemy was already sending over his scouts, small Taubes which seemed to glide down over the hills, poise for a few moments above the rushes and after climbing up again to the necessary height, fly back to their own lines.<sup>1</sup> A body of French cavalry passed about ten o'clock riding from the camp of Chalons—they were from the remount camp which was being evacuated—

<sup>1</sup> They did not all return. On the morning of September 3, near Sillery-le-Beaumont, a Taube was brought down by our troops, one of its occupants was killed, the other was made prisoner. "At eight o'clock the aeroplane incident. . . . It excited great curiosity. A crowd rushed towards the scene of the fall. Burial of the German who was killed." (Journal of General Moussy.)

Abstract from the notes of Élie C . . . of the 77th regiment: "On Thursday, September 3, . . . while the 77th was resting in the vineyards, a Taube suddenly appeared from behind a hill. The aviators did not seem to see the regiment at first; they advanced confidently, flying so low that our men thought they were going to alight. But the Taube suddenly began to rise; the alarm was given; rifles went off, a machine gun came into action, the Taube was brought down about one kilometre away, among the vines, its pilot wounded, its observer riddled with bullets."

towards Montereau. General Prot with three companies of the 7th dragoons and the 4th and 15th chasseurs,<sup>1</sup> left Sézanne at the same hour.<sup>2</sup> We had at that time no intention of establishing our line of resistance on the Marne ; the re-establishment projected by the generalissimo was to take place further south, probably towards the Aube.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, during the course of the day the inhabitants were requested by public proclamation to take "any arms in their possession" to the *Mairie* ; the post-office officials received orders to send all their valuables, cash-books, and ledgers to Sézanne. The afternoon passed without incident, but during the night the roads which led down on to the marshes from Saint-Prix, Villevenard, Joches, Aulnizeux, and Morains-le-Petit were filled with marching troops. "At one o'clock in the morning," writes M. Roland, "we were awakened by the barking of a dog and a ring at the door-bell. The wives and little children of two soldiers of the Étoges brigade had come to throw themselves on our hospitality. A little later and other doors also were being knocked at ; voices were

<sup>1</sup> The chasseurs correspond to our mounted rifles.

<sup>2</sup> *La Guerre en Champagne*. (Account of the Abbé Renaudin, Arch-priest of Sézanne.)

<sup>3</sup> "The troops will fall back on the Aube, if need be, as far as the Seine. Everything will be subordinated to preparations for the success of the offensive." (Report on the whole of the operations. *Bulletin des Armées du 3 au 5 Décembre, 1914*.) "September 2. The generalissimo advised Marshal French, the Minister of War and the Governor of Paris that it was impossible to consider at that time a combined manœuvre embracing the whole of our forces, on the Marne." (Documents published by the *Renaissance* of September 2, 1916.)



VILLEVENARD  
*From a drawing by Emile Genet*



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## The Preliminaries of the Battle 9

heard in the night, no longer in isolated groups but in bands of fifty, a hundred, or in even larger numbers. The immigrants were overflowing now in every direction. Pale, hollow-eyed, stiff-limbed, they surrendered themselves speechlessly to the refuge which the compassion of the inhabitants opened out to them. But fear is stronger even than fatigue. Hardly had they rested when they fared forth again; others took their place. It was a human torrent which now poured down towards the marshes and which was increased by new affluents at every turn of the road: one could imagine oneself back in the days of the great barbaric migrations. . . . On the road from Oyes, an old mare, her back broken by the weight of her load, lay on her knees in the dust, the little girl who was leading her flung her arms round the faithful animal's neck in a last farewell. . . . In front of the *Auberge des Renard* a mother sang softly to her dead child as she rocked it tenderly in her arms, refusing to be parted from it. . . ."

Most of these immigrants came from the Argonne and the Ardennes. For forty-eight hours they passed in crowds along the roads. They were questioned; they knew nothing save that the enemy was advancing by forced marches and that the horizon behind them was aflame. The thunder of the cannonade became ever more distinct. But the natural calm of rural populations preserves them from any foolish panic. They do not give way to excitement. From the villages, and even from isolated farms, it was only the men who fell to be mobilised under the next levy who went away. At Villevénard, Abbé Rouyer was about to hide

the younger members of his flock among the rushes, "to evade the first contact with the enemy," when an artillery officer represented to him that in the event of bombardment that virgilian refuge might well be unsafe. The Abbé then directed his party to the convent of Andecy and was about to return to Villevenard himself. But he was stopped on the road and turned back.

Billeting officers appeared at the *Mairie* on the morning of September 4 to arrange for quarters. They had no time to lose, for our troops were expected in the afternoon. They were units of the Ninth Army, at first only small detachments (August 29), joined on September 4 by the IXth army corps, General Dubois; the XIth, General Eydoux; the 42nd infantry division, General Grossetti; the 9th cavalry division, General de l'Espée, and two reserve divisions attached to the IXth and XIth army corps, the 52nd infantry division, General Battesti, and the 60th, General Joppe.<sup>1</sup> This army, half of which had retreated from Belgium while the other half arrived from Lorraine,<sup>2</sup> had been

<sup>1</sup> Contrary to general belief, the Morocco division under General Humbert did not form an autonomous division, and had been attached to the IXth corps from August 20, replacing the 18th division (General Lefèvre) detained in Lorraine (with the exception of the 36th brigade and a battalion of the 37th) until September 6, the date of its departure for Troyes, where it became incorporated in Foch's army.

<sup>2</sup> This explains how the concentration of the various units was not yet completed on the 5th. Therefore the 18th division, of which mention was made in the preceding note, and which was at Nomény, did not come into line until the evening of the 7th. But on the other hand, the 60th reserve division, which has sometimes been erroneously represented as a fresh division, had operated since the beginning

## The Preliminaries of the Battle 11

placed under the command of General Foch, who came straight from Nancy where he had given proof of his powers at the head of the XXth corps.

The Ninth Army knew nothing of the intentions of the generalissimo. But rumours were abroad which were not lost by the quick ears of these shrewd people of Champagne—"It is the last day of our retreat;"<sup>1</sup> we are preparing for "a battle of great importance."<sup>2</sup> Momentous decisions, however carefully guarded, can never be kept in complete secrecy; there is always an atmosphere around them, something of the nature of a halo, which gives them away. Perhaps also, in this case, the decision of the generalissimo accorded too well with the profound desires, the ardent hopes, of these men of whom, even when conquerors as at Guise, at Launois, at the Fosse-à-l'Eau, at Bertencourt, it had been demanded that they should still retreat; that they should hold as nothing partial successes which were only to be considered as episodes; that they should possess their souls in patience till the hour of destiny should strike. They had been told that they were making a strategic retreat in echelons. They believed it at first. But the more the retreat was prolonged the more time did its insidious work, the more

of the war with the Fourth Army, and had been through the Belgian campaign under the command of General de Langle de Cary. It had been in action notably on the Semoy, at Donchéry, at Tourteron, had taken part in the retreat from the Meuse to the Aisne, had then been in camp at Chalons, where it had been attached to Foch's army.

<sup>1</sup> Journal of M. Roland.

<sup>2</sup> *La Guerre en Champagne*. (Journal of the Mother-Superior of Andecy.)

suspicion crept in, and in these last days the men's hearts were sick within them at the thought of the wide tracts of their own country they had been forced to cede to the enemy. Like angry children they stamped on their rations, which the good sisters of Andecy afterwards gathered up for their hens. An African officer gruffly demanded absinthe in a shop. When the salesman refused to serve him he seized the bottle forcibly: "So much the worse!" he cried. "One drowns hypocrisy as best one may!" And another called out to the schoolmaster, "You and your pacifist preachings are the cause of all this! I hate you! I detest you!"

The bitterness of the retreat, combined with a frenzy of patriotism, had exasperated them even to injustice. The superior officers, holding themselves under better control, kept silence. General Petit, who slept in the Presbytery at Villevenard, and whom Abbé Rouyer asked "if there was danger?" replied evasively, "that he knew nothing, that the French army was executing a plan known only to the grand staff." The mayor and the schoolmaster fared no better with the colonel. "What were the people to do? To go or to stay?"—"One would see to-morrow." But at eleven o'clock that night the troops departed noiselessly. The French were still retreating, and that was a disappointment for the people of the marshes—as if, under any circumstances, French soldiers could fight with the marshes behind them! The contingents which followed did not halt in the villages. Infantry, artillery, cavalry, pressed on immediately in the direction of the marshes. The wounded told how they had repulsed a night

## The Preliminaries of the Battle 13

attack near Verzy ;<sup>1</sup> others described how the German artillery stationed near Monthelon had bombarded them at Étoges. Verzy lies to the north of the Marne ; Étoges is only a few kilometres from the marshes. A new pattern of enemy aeroplane flew over the hills and swooped down in a volplane like a hawk. But its advent had been signalled : a French machine went up to meet it, shots were exchanged and the enemy made off.<sup>2</sup>

But he had seen what he wanted to see : our troops in retreat over the whole line ; the northern border of the marshes undefended ; the roads clear in all directions. It was now the morning of September 5. Guns thundered from Montmort, Étoges, and Congy. Our rear-guards, which had set out from Oger-Pocancy during the night,<sup>3</sup> came only to defend the marshes, and there was such a short distance between them and

<sup>1</sup> " A night attack at Petites-Loges on September 4 was repulsed at half-past three by the 9th company : 3 killed, 12 wounded, including the lieutenant who commanded the company. Four prisoners were taken and about 20 helmets." (General Moussy's Journal of the Campaign.) This attack was repulsed by the 68th, which formed a brigade with the 90th regiment (see Appendix).

<sup>2</sup> " A German aeroplane coming from Étoges volplaned down in the direction of Villevenard. A French machine went up to meet it, and after exchanging a few shots, the enemy made off in the direction from which he had come. I proposed sending up a spreading rocket, but the authorities did not approve." (M. Roland's Journal.)

<sup>3</sup> The main army was encamped a little lower down, at Rouffy, Voipreux, Vertus, etc. The 52nd division (reserve) had already arrived at Coligny and Pierre-Morains. " Arrived at Voipreux at two o'clock (afternoon of the 4th). Lunch. Village empty, carts of emigrants full of women and children. The picture of desolation and of our im-

the advance enemy patrols that the inhabitants asked anxiously, "Whether our men would still have time to get as far as the Petit-Morin and destroy the bridges behind them?" But not a single explosion was heard, except from the direction of Coizard where the little iron footbridge was blown up.<sup>1</sup> Anxiety was becoming intense. Was the French army, perhaps, to continue its retreat and to abandon also the southern shore of the marshes?—these marshes which it would be so easy to defend; which every one had thought would form the last barrier, providentially placed in the way of the invasion. We agonised exactly as if it were already determined not to utilise the marshes; we seemed to have forgotten the historic function of this great natural trench, many kilometres in extent!

By 8 o'clock on the morning of September 5, part of the left of von Bülow's army had entered Baye, which was hardly a league from the western extremity of the marshes. By that beautiful road, the "ru" de Toury, which leads down a gentle slope through the deep shadows of the wood, the Uhlans descended towards Talus-Saint-Prix, patrolled the village, then passed on to the bridge over the Petit-Morin, which they crossed unmolested: the finest highway of the marshes had fallen—without a blow being struck—into the hands of the enemy; the way was open towards Mondement. The enemy had only to follow it up. But no doubt  
potence. . . . Left 2.45 (morning of 5th) by Bergères-les-Vertus, Écury, Fère-Champenoise, for Œuvy." (General Moussy's Journal of the Campaign.)

<sup>1</sup> The footbridge was certainly blown up. But there is some doubt as to whether it was blown up by our troops or by the Germans.

## The Preliminaries of the Battle 15

von Bülow, who did not hesitate to push his right towards Esternay, wanted to wait till the extreme left of his Second Army had linked up at Vertus—to the north-east of the marshes—with the Saxon regiments of von Hausen, which had come down from Tours-sur-Marne and from Condé, and which could not arrive till near midday.<sup>1</sup> One knows that the quartering of German troops is carried out in echelons, so that one part of the army continues the march while the other part rests. But taking everything into consideration, and even although Vertus—a strategic point of the highest importance—possessed a net-work of excellent roads, radiating out in all directions, it was difficult for the extreme left of von Bülow and for the Saxons of von Hausen to reach the marshes before two or three o'clock in the afternoon. This delay allowed us to recover ourselves, and the incomprehensible hesitation which seized the German army before the marshes, which it had attained but which apparently it could not make up its mind to cross, was the saving of the French.

But by degrees, from Saint-Prix to the outskirts of Morains, over the whole northern slope of the hill, "grey tunics" descended the slopes and found their way into the vineyards; it was like an "invasion of

<sup>1</sup> "Towards midday, Saxon regiments quartered themselves peaceably in our town and in our houses. They took possession in a methodical way and paid no attention to the local authorities. One felt that they knew the place, and that their time before the war had been well spent in the service of their country. They form part of von Hausen's Third Army." (*Cantonal Archives of Vertus.*)



field-mice." Sheltered in their cellars, the villagers awaited the shock which could not now be long delayed. In some places they demanded admittance to those burial vaults, hollowed out in the soft stone of the hills, which had recently been excavated by Baron de Baye and M. Roland. But the enemy did not move from the borders of the marshes. It has been supposed that the enigma of these vast marshy plains, the secret of these still waters—which had opened to conceal the golden casket of Attila—filled the enemy with a mysterious stupor. Or, perhaps, before engaging in this doubtful region he wished to assure himself of the support of his heavy artillery. Whatever the cause, he felt his ground cautiously through his scouts; at the same time a German patrol from Saint-Prix threw itself on Vert-la-Gravelle and crossed an arm of the water in the direction of Morains-le-Petit. The grip of the pincers was beginning to tighten.

With a little more rapidity of execution, a little less defiance on the part of their high command, the Germans could have closed on the marshes from that instant. For a vigorous offensive launched against Mondement before midday could only have met with a feeble resistance from us. And Mondement was regarded as the strategic key of the marshes. The reason of this was that Joffre's general order, a wonderful improvisation of the night, had not yet reached the staff of the Ninth Army, which, conforming to previous orders, continued its retreat towards the south. The XIth corps was to advance on Sommesous, the IXth on Gourgançon, the 42nd reserve division on the right

## The Preliminaries of the Battle 17

bank of the Aube.<sup>1</sup> General Franchet d'Espérey also refusing battle, fell back in conformity with the same orders behind the line of the Grand-Morin. Von Bülow's right, which came down from Montmirail, had thus carried Soigny, Le Gault, Charleville that forenoon without resistance ; it was to enter Esternay that same night, where its patrols, operating in the direction of Champguyon, had captured thirteen of our patrols, who a few minutes earlier had been amusing themselves knocking down pears from the trees by the roadside. According to all available information, the German front, which since midday had curved sharply from the forest of Gault to Villeseneux, was seeking to straighten itself out on a line passing through Fère and Sézanne and embracing the marshes.

It would have been tempting for a general like Foch to try to profit by the hesitation of the Germans and to oppose the straightening of their line, had it not been even more important to keep strictly in line with the general front of the French army. Almost till midday Foch was able to think that this front inclined towards

<sup>1</sup> " We left Vertus early this morning, we were to go south of Fère-Champenoise, to Corroy, but the order, so impatiently awaited, arrived from the general staff *towards midday*," etc. (Asker, *Mondement*.) " Weather cool and cloudy till *eleven o'clock*, then sun and heat. At Fère-Champenoise, counter-orders ; instead of taking the offensive to-morrow behind the Aube, we are to form a shield at Mont-Toulon. A delicate movement." (General Moussy's Journal.) " The advance guard of the 151st had just arrived at Bannes, when, *towards eleven o'clock*, General Foch's order arrived : to stop the retreat, to advance towards the north in order to bar the way to the German offensive and force the enemy to retreat." (Journal of Colonel D . . .)

the Aube,<sup>1</sup> and he followed that movement without occupying the marshes, when suddenly, towards ten o'clock, he received the general order dictated during the night by Joffre. The part of the order which affected Foch ran in these terms : " The Ninth Army will cover the right of the Fifth Army, holding the debouches to the south of the marshes of Saint-Gond

<sup>1</sup> In fact, all the generalissimo's dispositions had been arranged with a view to taking the offensive on this line, towards which he had ordered his reinforcements and his food convoys to converge. During the night of September 4, after three long telephonic conversations with Gallieni (*L'Armée de Paris et la bataille de l'Ourcq*, by General Bonnal), who, informed as to von Klück's change of front towards the Ourcq, pressed the generalissimo, rightly or wrongly, to seize the opportunity and advance the date of the offensive, Joffre improvised the general order, of which we give above the extract concerning the Ninth Army, and whose general terms were as follows :

" 1. It is expedient to profit from the hazardous situation of the First German Army and to concentrate against it the efforts of the extreme left of the Allied Army. All necessary dispositions have been arranged to take place during September 5 ; the attack to be launched on the 6th.

" 2. The preparations to be completed by the evening of September 5 are :

" (a) All available forces of the Sixth Army to the north-east of Meaux must be ready to cross the Ourcq between Lizy-sur-Ourcq and May-en-Multien, in the general direction of Chateau-Thierry. Available units of the 1st cavalry corps which are near at hand will be placed under the command of General Manoury for this operation.

" (b) The British Army, established on the Changis-Coulommiers front, facing east, will be ready to attack in the direction of Montmirail.

" (c) The Fifth Army, closing up gradually on its left, will establish itself on the front Courtacon-Esternay-Sézanne, ready to attack ; the 2nd cavalry corps will assure the liaison between the British Army and the Fifth Army.

" (d) The Ninth Army will cover the right of the Fifth Army, holding

## The Preliminaries of the Battle 19

and posting a part of its forces on the plateau to the north of Sézanne."

But from 6.45 in the morning, in view of an imminent renewal of the offensive, the IXth and XIth corps had been ordered not to proceed further south than the line Montépreux - Connantre - Œuvy - Gourgançon-Courcelles, and to leave rear-guards to the south of the marshes. At 10.30, having received Joffre's general order, Foch commanded his advanced units to recross

the debouches to the south of the marshes of Saint-Gond and posting a part of its forces on the plateau to the north of Sézanne.

"3. The offensive will be made by the various armies on the morning of September 6. J. JOFFRE."

It was this "order of the day," brought only in the morning to the knowledge of the commanding-officers, which determined, on the afternoon of the 5th, the sudden arrest of the retreat. It concerned the Allied Armies of the extreme left exclusively. The Fourth and Third Armies of the right wing received their special instructions at the close of the day :

"Fourth Army. To-morrow, September 6, our armies of the left will attack the front and the flank of the First and Second German Armies. The Fourth Army, stopping its southward movement, will advance towards the enemy, linking its movement to that of the Eighth Army, which, debouching to the north of Revigny, will assume the offensive in advancing towards the Ourcq.

"Third Army. The Third Army, screening itself towards the north-east, will debouch towards the west, to attack the left flank of the enemy forces which are operating to the west of the Argonne. It will join its action to that of the Fourth Army, which has orders to engage the enemy."

And so every contingency was foreseen by the generalissimo. "The orders of General Joffre," writes General Bonnal, a reliable judge, "sent out on the evening of the 5th and the morning of September 6, constitute the plan of the battle of the Marne. In the same way Napoleon dictated, on December 1, 1805, the plan of the battle fought on the following day."

the marshes and to establish themselves strongly on Congy, Toulon-la-Montagne, etc. Dispatch riders were sent out in all directions to carry this order to the various commanders. Immediately the retreat was stopped: our troops at once offered resistance. And it was time.

The enemy, struck by that species of paralysis which had so often arrested him in front of imaginary obstacles, had happily pushed only his advance guards towards the marshes. He had not even occupied Toulon-la-Montagne, a natural salient, the steep wooded slopes of which form a glacis commanding the whole plain to the north, but which is itself overlooked by the semicircle of hills surrounding it from Champaubert to Mont-Aimé. Suddenly, between 3 and 4 o'clock, French guns thundered on Saint-Prix, then about 6 o'clock on Coizard and farther off towards Morains-le-Petit. From Villevenard one could hear the fusillade distinctly and the rat-tat of the machine-guns below Joches, beside the pond of Chénevry.<sup>1</sup> The enemy replied by bombarding Bannes and the two Broussys, where the main body of the Morocco division and the 17th division were hurrying to rejoin their rear-guards. The enemy also fired incendiary bombs into Clamanges, Pierre-Morains and Coligny, a district where we had only artillery on guard. These sudden and irregular attacks were but a feeble remedy for the slowness of the enemy's concentration. The 2nd battalion of the 135th regiment,<sup>2</sup> supported by three

<sup>1</sup> Journal of M. Roland.

<sup>2</sup> "In foreign armies an infantry regiment is generally made up of three battalions acting together under a colonel's command." (Buchan, *op. cit.* vol. i. p. 252.)

## The Preliminaries of the Battle 21

batteries of the 17th division, was able, almost without resistance, to occupy Toulon-la-Montagne and the Razet wood ; on the Aulnay-aux-Planches road the Noblet battalion of the same regiment threw itself hotly upon the heels of the German patrol which had escaped away towards Aulnizeux, threw it into confusion and took possession of Vert-la-Gravelle ; the approaches to the north and east of the village were put in a state of defence by our troops, and the staff of the 17th division took up its quarters there for the night.<sup>1</sup>

The operations succeeded brilliantly on this side. In fact, at one point Captain Sanceret, with the 12th company of the 3rd battalion, took a German battery established under the walls of the castle of Vert, at the point of the bayonet. But in the central part of the marshes, Blondlat's brigade of the Morocco division, which had been ordered to push one of its regiments as far as Congy by way of Aulnizeux and Joches, and also to direct the colonial infantry regiment to Courjeonnet by Bannes and Coizard, came into contact with overwhelming enemy forces and was obliged to fall back during the night on Broussy-le-Grand. The regiments of Cros and Fellert had already arrived there with divisional artillery, though some "arabas" (light waggons from Morocco) had stuck in the mud while crossing the marshes. The losses suffered in the course of this hazardous raid, especially by Sautel's colonial battalion at Quatre-Routes, where it charged with the

<sup>1</sup> E. M. at Vert-la-Gravelle. "Lay down at midnight and rose at 3:30 in the morning." (General Moussy's Journal of the Campaign.)

solemn fury habitual to these troops crying, "To the death! To the death!"<sup>1</sup> did not affect the moral of the brigade, which was to resume the offensive at 3 o'clock the next morning.<sup>2</sup>

Things went better for us in the beginning at Saint-Prix, where an advance unit of the 42nd division was in action. General Grossetti's order, issued about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, commanded the 84th brigade (Colonel Trouchaud) to advance towards Villeneuve, Soizy and the Branle wood. The 83rd brigade, under General Krien, was to advance in the region of Mondement, Oyes and the Botrait wood. The artillery (five brigades) was to take up positions as follows: The 61st (three brigades under Colonel Boichut) in the neighbourhood of Broussy, Mondement and Reuves; the 46th (two brigades under Colonel Coffec) between Montgivroux and Mondement. Shortly afterwards the 2nd brigade of the 61st (Major Ménétrier) moved off towards Oyes, to search the Usages wood and cover the advance of the French towards Saint-Prix. At that town, the marshes are confined between high wooded hills: the road from Baye, which follows a gentle slope flanked by tall poplars, crosses the Petit-Morin and rises by a series of loops towards the height called Le Signal du Poirier, between the wood of Grandes-Garenes and that of Botrait. Nothing could have been more simple that morning than to block this road. And nothing could be more difficult than to retake it should

<sup>1</sup> From the account of Mme. Bression, wife of the farmer at Joches.

<sup>2</sup> Asker, *op. cit.*

## The Preliminaries of the Battle 23

the force holding it be strongly fortified. But the enemy had done nothing save to send a few scouts and snipers into the neighbouring thickets : they were dislodged without much trouble. By 4 o'clock we were in command of the bridge of Saint-Prix and of the church, which stands a little distance away from the village. The enemy's advance guard fell back to the other side of the Petit-Morin, on the mill at Toury, where the men hastily dug themselves in.<sup>1</sup> It was a slight advantage and of short duration, the enemy soon returning in force. The counter-attack of the chasseurs had nevertheless freed the approaches of Mondement where General Grossetti had just installed himself with his staff. We held all the neighbouring heights, l'Homme-Blanc, the Signal du Poirier, Montgivroux, the wood of Saint-Gond, etc. From Villeneuve-lès-Charleville to Humbauville our troops took up their position on the whole front, to the west, south and east of the marshes. The cavalry (7th hussars, 10th mounted chasseurs, 1st, 3rd and 24th dragoons, and 25th cyclist chasseurs) linked up the different corps ; the artillery was posted at the debouches of the roads and on the crests of the hills, Toulon-la-Montagne, Allemant, Mont-Août. . . .

The enemy was astonished by such audacity. He could not credit this right-about-turn of the French troops ; that they should dare to dispute with him " the proud privilege of the initiative," to adopt the style of Bernhardt. The battle in which he suddenly

<sup>1</sup> According to Adrien Diart, farmer, who was present and witnessed the affair. The mill of Toury is now used simply as a farm.



found himself engaged appeared to him as a skirmish of the rear-guard, only a little more violent than former skirmishes had been. Eventually, except on our left, where in consequence of Franchet d'Espérey's retreat, von Bülow dangerously outflanked us, we slept, we and the enemy, practically on these respective positions. To the north-east of the marshes, Dubois, whose tactical genius was a powerful factor in the final success, had even encroached to a considerable extent on the German line ; but in consequence of the check to Blondlat's advance on Congy, the Eon brigade, which had taken Toulon-la-Montagne and Vert-la-Gravelle, found itself uncovered till 3 o'clock in the morning.

The night was clear, a night of the early September days—starlit and mysterious. Towards 11 o'clock the cannonade died down, the marshes were wrapped in silence.

But there was an angry glow in the western sky : Vert-la-Gravelle, Pierre-Morains and Coligny were on fire.

II

THE 6TH OF SEPTEMBER

WHEN dawn came on Sunday, September 6, everything was still quiet. One would not have thought that war was vexing this melancholy landscape. Of the immense body of troops which covered the borders of the marshes, nothing was apparent to the naked eye. The cry of the wild duck was heard among the rushes, which were already beginning to show the golden tints of autumn. The sense of peace was everywhere so great that the inhabitants, hidden in the burial vaults of the hill, thinking all danger at an end, came out of their shelters and descended towards the village. It was 6 o'clock. "While waiting for our early coffee," writes M. Roland, "we climbed up a little eminence to the west of the school to have a look out over the plain. Not a soldier ; not a sound." But it was a misleading calm ; suddenly bullets whistled past their ears ; our cave-dwellers had only time to turn round and regain their vaults.

Nothing was yet afoot, however, except a fusillade from the outposts. But at 8 o'clock<sup>1</sup> a tremendous report was heard ; flashes of fire streaked the heights ; the guns thundered forth. Our troops had just received

<sup>1</sup> " At eight o'clock guns began to thunder quite near us from Congy and Courjeonnet. The real battle had begun." (M. Roland's Journal.)

Joffre's famous order—that immortal proclamation, curt and bald as any ancient inscription, which shines on the escutcheon of the Victory of the Marne and which every Frenchman knows by heart :—

“ At the moment when we are about to engage in a battle on which the welfare of the country depends, I must remind you all that the time for looking behind is past. All efforts must be directed to attacking and driving back the enemy. An army which can no longer advance must, cost what it may, hold the conquered ground, and perish where it stands rather than give way. In present circumstances, no wavering can be tolerated.”<sup>1</sup>

On the reading of this “ order of the day,” a thrill passed through the whole immense front which extended from Alsace to the entrenched camp at Paris. Now at last the clouds which had enveloped the

<sup>1</sup> It is convenient at this point to compare, as has already been done elsewhere, the “ order of the day ” found at Vitry-le-François and signed by General Tulff von Tscheppe. No document forms a stronger indictment against the German mentality, or points more directly to the abyss which separates the two civilisations.

“ The end followed in our long and laborious marches has been attained. The main French forces have been forced to accept the battle, after having been consistently thrown back. The great decision is undoubtedly near at hand. To-morrow, then, the whole forces of the German Army, as well as those of our Army Corps, will be engaged over the whole line from Paris to Verdun. *To save the well-being and the honour of Germany*, I expect of every officer and every soldier, notwithstanding the severe and heroic struggle of these last days, that he will do his very utmost, and that to his last breath. Everything depends on the result of to-morrow.”

It seems that well-being goes before honour in the minds of the soldiers of Kultur.

dilatory strategy of the generalissimo were rolled away ; the troops could appreciate the deep-laid plans of their leader ; they knew that should victory smile upon them this time, the bugle-call of the retreat would no longer embitter their triumph ; they knew also how formidable was the stake of the attacking troops.

“ This is the ‘ decisive shock.’ . . . From the highest officer to the humblest private there is not one of us who does not feel certain of that.”<sup>1</sup> This accurate appreciation of the situation, grasped at the same moment and through all branches of the service by officers and men alike, made them all as of one mind,<sup>2</sup> and while they prepared themselves for the necessary sacrifices, they were filled with the sense of the nobility of their cause, the reason for their sacrifice ; they were uplifted by a divine illumination, as at Marathon, as at Bouvines, as at Valmy. The Battle of the Marne, full of the unknown, of mystery, for the Germans, was for us the victory of transparent clearness.

At the moment when Joffre’s “ order of the day ” reached our troops, the respective positions of the armies of Foch, von Bülow and von Hausen were practically as follows : The Xth active corps of von Bülow’s army was facing towards Baye-Congy ; part of the Guard faced in the direction of Morains-Écury-le-Repos, the main body being in reserve at Vertus

<sup>1</sup> Asker, *op. cit.* “ This is the great battle on which the fate of the country depends.” (General Moussy’s Journal of the Campaign.)

<sup>2</sup> “ Every one of us, from the chief to the humblest private, had in his heart the implacable *will* to conquer.” (Letter from General B . . . , colonel of artillery at the Marne.)

and the parks of artillery at Étrechy ; the XIIth active Saxon corps of von Hausen faced towards Normée-Vassimont ; the XIIth reserve Saxon corps<sup>1</sup> faced towards Sommesous. Of Foch's army, the 42nd division occupied the heights of Saint-Prix, Soizy, the wood of Saint-Gond, the steep slopes of Mondement, and the plateau of Villeneuve-lès-Charleville ; the IXth corps (Morocco division and 17th division) held all the southern border of the marshes, from Oyes to Morains-le-Petit, with advance guards at Aulnay-aux-Planches, Aulnizeux, Vert-la-Gravelle, Coizard and Toulon-la-Montagne ; the XIth corps formed the liaison with Morains-le-Petit, the eastern extremity of the marshes, and extended by Écurey-le-Repos, Normée and Lenharrée as far as Sommesous, with advance guards towards Coligny and Pierre-Morains ; the 9th cavalry division was at Mailly with an advance guard towards Vatry, and the reserve divisions of the IXth and XIth corps (52nd and 60th divisions) were between Broussy and Mont-Août, Sommesous and Cœuvy respectively.

A short examination of these positions shows plainly how the Ninth Army, numerically inferior to the opposing forces, was obliged in the meantime to content itself with a rôle of "active defence," to use a military expression. It dealt in barrage more than any of the other armies, and it did this most of all from its centre, that is to say, from the most sensitive part of

<sup>1</sup> According to M. Babin, the 32nd division of the XIIth Saxon corps operated against Foch's army, while the 25th division, by way of Vatry and Cœuvy, attacked Langle de Cary's army in the direction of Sompuis.

## The 6th of September 29

its line ; for were Foch's front broken, the whole disposition of the French army would crack. That would be particularly the case in regard to the offensive which the Fifth Army on our left was commanded to undertake, which was to be pushed in the general direction of Montmirail in conjunction with Franchet d'Espérey. The same would apply to the Fourth Army on our right under Langle de Cary, which, victorious on the Meuse on August 27, was eager to resume its forward march and pushed on in the direction of Vitry-le-François. But between Humbauville, on which the left of the Fourth Army rested, and Sommesous, the base of the right wing of the IXth corps, there was a wide gap, a hiatus fifteen kilometres in extent, and General de l'Espée had been given the difficult task of filling up this gap with his cavalry. By extraordinary luck, a hiatus in the German front corresponded exactly with this gap in ours ; the Germans did not perceive until too late that we had nothing there but a thin screen of troops.

Holding Esternay and Charleville, von Bülow was thus in command of the western extremity of the plateau of Sézanne and was bound to attempt the complete occupation of this plateau, the abrupt borders of which commanded the whole valley of the Aube—an immense stretch of country—as far as Troyes, whose towers are visible against the horizon on a clear day. Pressure would therefore be exerted against us towards Villeneuve-lès-Charleville and Soisy, where the united efforts of the celebrated 42nd division from Verdun and a part of Franchet d'Espérey's army would

certainly not be too great to sustain the shock. In the east, the Guards by Morains-le-Petit and the Saxon troops over the flats of Champagne-Pouilleuse tried to advance as far as Fère and Sommesous. But the marshes lay between, that great natural greenish trench, the southern boundaries of which we held strongly, supported also from the neighbouring heights. But should the double manœuvre of von Bülow and von Hausen succeed in the south, we would be blocked, held firm in that muddy trap which would thus see the disaster of the troops of Marie-Louise repeated. That would probably have been the soundest plan for the enemy to follow ;<sup>1</sup> it was simply the old manœuvre of envelopment so dear to the strategists beyond the Rhine. But in order to ensure the success of this plan it would have been necessary for the enemy to abandon the marshes and Mondement, to deceive our troops in front of them by a ruse, and to carry out simultaneously at the rear of our left and the flank of our right the attack of the two armies which would afterwards have been reunited at Sézanne or at Pleurs.

The enemy thought differently. Hypnotised by Mondement and the fire which we directed from the neighbouring heights on his troops, he wished to carry

<sup>1</sup> It appears, however, that the enemy did perceive this possibility, but too late. His manœuvre of September 8 (a massed attack simultaneously launched against both our wings) corresponds closely to the plan indicated. From that time, except on the afternoon of the 7th, he attacked our left wing alone. He could not bring himself to give up Mondement on the 8th or the 9th and lost precious time, which might have been better spent in forcing us further south on Sézanne by Bout-de-la-Ville and Lachy.

## The 6th of September 31

the castle by a sudden attack, the castle which is certainly the strategic key of the marshes, but of the marshes alone. These tactics compelled him also to carry the south-western boundary of the marshes. He could have done it on the morning of the 5th by forced marches, especially as we were falling back on Corroy. It became more difficult from the moment when we began to offer resistance.

The marshes of Saint-Gond, which stretch from east to west, do not, it is true, cover an extent of fifteen leagues, as Bassompierre, the great romancer of the seventeenth century, claimed; they are eighteen kilometres long by four or five broad.<sup>1</sup> They are intersected by a number of roads of which some can only be termed country tracks. The best of the roads, the only ones which are well built, metalled and capable of carrying heavy artillery, cross the marshes at their extremities, Saint-Prix, Morains-le-Petit, and in the centre, from Joches to Broussy.<sup>2</sup> Though he did not

<sup>1</sup> Abbé Voillereau gives an account of them in a letter he was good enough to write to me: "The marshes cover an area of 5000 hectares (equivalent to 10,000 English acres). They embrace fourteen communes: Morains, Aulnay, Coligny, Aulnizeux, Vert-la-Gravelle, Coizard, Courjeonnet, Villevenard, Talus, Oyes, Reuves, Broussy-le-Petit, Broussy-le-Grand and Bannes. The President of the Syndicate of the Marshes of Saint-Gond for the irrigation, care and draining of the marshes is M. Renou of Bannes. At present, with the exception of small portions belonging to the various communes, the proprietors of the marshes are Mme. de Saint-Genis of the Castle of Aulnay, M. Renou-Triquetot of Bannes and M. Objeois of Amiens."

<sup>2</sup> As yet, however, the enemy did not advance further towards Broussy on the 8th than la Verrerie, an old industrial establishment, now transformed into a farm. On Sunday we had had machine-guns at the end of the avenue of pine trees. "It was here," said Mme.



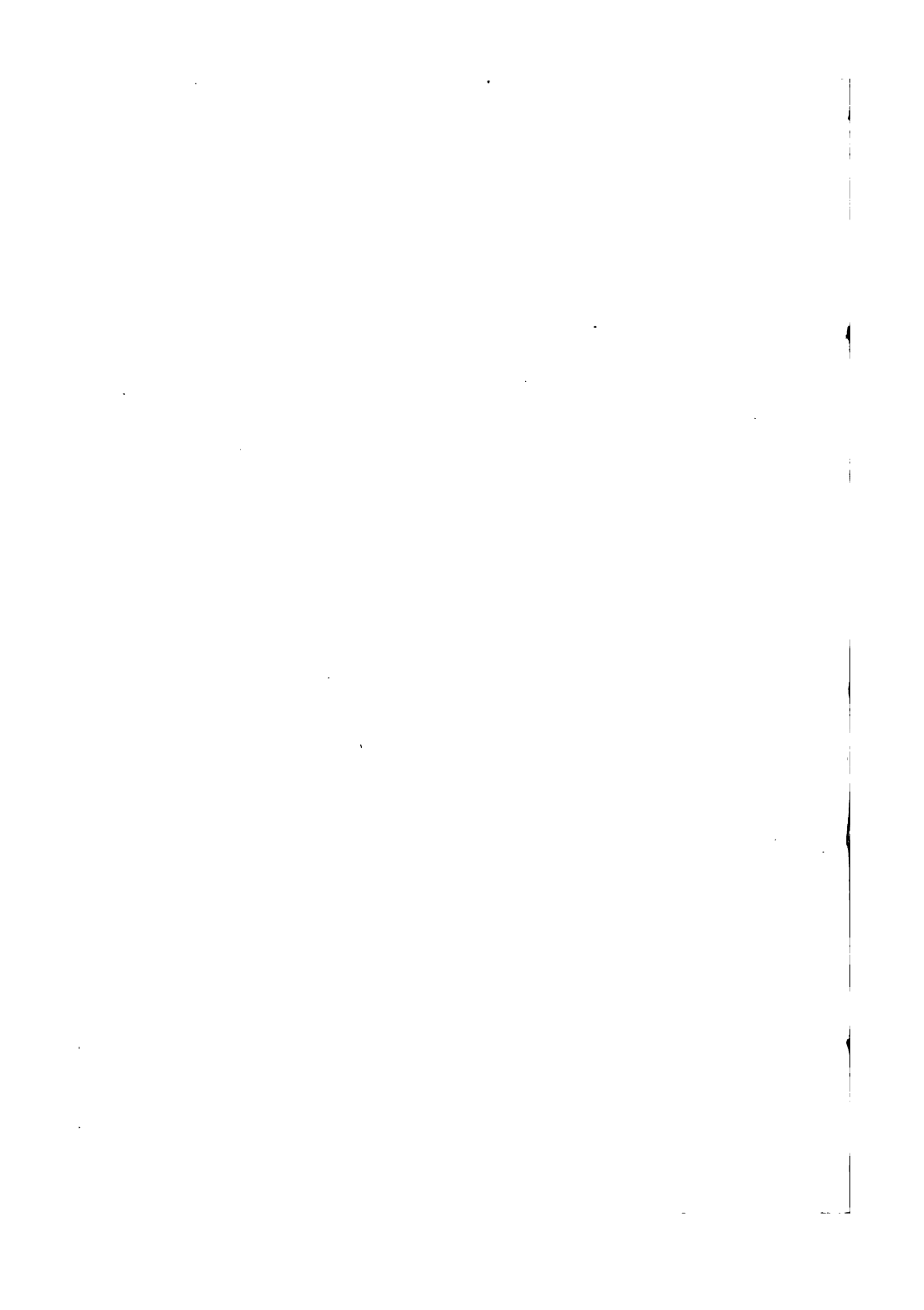
afterwards disdain to use the other roads, the enemy sought first to assure himself the possession of these three essential highroads. But the greater part of his heavy artillery was left behind in the natural hollows in the heights of Loizy-en-Brie, Courjeonnet, the heights of Congy, the slope of Chenaille and the wood of Andecy.<sup>1</sup>

Lecourt, the farmer's wife, "that Lieutenant Bloquel of the 3rd Zouaves, who was wounded in the arm, and whose men had been sent to the military cemetery of Coizard, was put to death by a bayonet thrust in the chest; his body was robbed and his money taken away. The Germans had placed a half-battery in the avenue and an ambulance at la Verrerie itself. And a proof that they burn their dead or send them away is, that when I re-entered la Verrerie after our own troops, there were among the ruins several hundred pairs of worn boots, an incredible quantity of clothes, and heaps of cartridges as high as this table (*sic*). These things had belonged to the 16th and 53rd German infantry." Perhaps we may state here that the case of Lieutenant Bloquel was far from being unique. In the neighbourhood of Écury-le-Repos, "Second-Lieutenant Beneteau, of the 337th, had been wounded on September 8; the barbarians killed him brutally." On the heights which command the church of Saint-Prix to the south "about 200 bodies were found, of which the heads had been battered in with blows from rifle butts." This last fact is confirmed in part by the Commission of Enquiry of May 6, 1915, where it is said that Privates Maillet and Sagneau of the 2nd Zouaves "had seen, while advancing to the attack on Saint-Prix, the bodies of about twenty-five Algerian tirailleurs, who had had their skulls knocked in with their own rifles, the butts of which were covered with blood." Jagneau added that "the lieutenant who commanded the section had been robbed of his arms, his papers, and even of his wedding ring."

<sup>1</sup> Even at the Signal du Poirier, when he had captured it, he had nothing but batteries of light artillery. "Some months after the battle," says M. Gervais-Courtellemont, "one could still see the deep infantry trenches, and the ruts and hoof marks of a half-battery of 77 mm. guns; then, alongside, by the furrows of the artillery waggons, a huge hole, hollowed out by the explosion of an important munition dump. . . . In the big clearing, another half-battery, etc." (*Les Champs de bataille de la Marne.*)



**THE MARSHES OF ST. GOND**  
*From a French Army Photograph*



## The 6th of September 33

At Morains-le-Petit it was the Guard which attacked in reply to our offensive ; on the Somme it was Saxon troops ; at Mondement it was, time-about or simultaneously, Hanoverians, Pomeranians or Brandenburgers, and no part of the struggle partook of a more obstinate character.

Even though the 42nd division was obliged to fall back behind the Petit-Morin and the bridge of Saint-Prix, in order to face the violent flank attacks which the enemy was directing against it towards Charleville, it must be remembered that we still held Grandes-Garenes, l'Homme Blanc, Soizy and the wood of Saint-Gond, which covered Mondement to the north and west : <sup>1</sup> the enemy had not succeeded in winning his way in, except in the Botrait wood, whence he tried to advance towards the farm of Mondement. Oyes, Reuves, Broussy-le-Petit, Broussy-le-Grand and Bannes were still in French hands, held by the IXth corps, which even pushed forward in company with

<sup>1</sup> On the morning of September 6, the situation of the 42nd division was precisely as follows : The 162nd regiment under Major Moisson, partly in the wood of Grandes-Garenes beyond Soizy and partly mounted in the Soizy-Baye road, dominated the valley of the Petit-Morin. The 151st regiment under Colonel Deville had two of its battalions to the north of la Villeneuve ; its third battalion formed a reserve, connecting the left of the regiment with the Xth corps. The 94th regiment, Colonel Margot, and two battalions of chasseurs (unmounted), the 8th under Major Clavel, the 19th under Major Ducornet) were posted in the rear towards Chapton, ready to support or to follow the attacking regiments, should they advance. The 10th regiment of mounted chasseurs (Colonel Laurent) was at Allemant ; the five brigades of artillery were to the north and west of la Villeneuve.

Moussy<sup>1</sup> and the 17th division. But Mondement Castle, a vast quadrilateral building, flanked by pepper-box towers which look out on one side to the marshes, was directly exposed to the fire of the guns established at Courjeonnet, Chenaille and Congy.

The castle, although poor in ornamentation, presents a striking appearance by reason of its massive nature, especially from the Broyes road, which commands a view of the chief entrance, closed by an iron gate, the pillars of which bear two langued lions.

Many times restored, it belonged in 1541 to a family called Chasserat, from whom it passed by marriage to a family of Geps; then to Lefèvre de Caumartin, then to Captain Lestrangle, a Provençal captain of dragoons, who came to grief through financial transactions with a contractor of that district, Honoré Bérard, who belonged originally to Cormontreuil near Rheims, and to whom Lestrangle found himself obliged to part with the castle. Along with the buildings, Bérard acquired the titles and seignorial rights, with which he was even more pleased than with his astuteness during the whole transaction. He came to grief under the Revolution. He was denounced by Oudet, the national agent of the district, as a being "absolutely immoral," dealing in "unpatriotic, suspicious, avaricious and litigious practices," who "allowed his food-stuffs and provisions to become unfit for human food," who tried "to starve the people," who "let his

<sup>1</sup> Moussy, who was then only a brigadier, was promised, from September 2, the provisional command of this division, whose honorary chief was General Dumas, afterwards succeeded by Guignabaudet.

house, Vaugirard, in the rue Bonnet Rouge, to Clermont-Tonnerre, the president of the infamous club of the monarchical party which held its meetings there." Bérard was arrested on October 23, 1794, at Sézanne, and his castle and offices had seals affixed to them. A subsequent inquiry revealed a few unthrashed sheaves of corn, an unbroached cask of wine, some diseased potatoes, five bushels of barley, eleven dozen bushels of hemp-seed of which a few seeds lay scattered on the floor, and—a more serious matter!—two packets of gunpowder, half a pound of bullets, and a sportsman's gun, three feet four inches in length, the butt covered with velvet, the barrel gilded.<sup>1</sup>

But it seems not to have been thought necessary, at that candid period, to put the castle in a state of defence or to send its proprietor to the scaffold. From that time, Mondement does not figure again in the chronicle; it fell asleep till the present war broke out. The castle did not greatly deteriorate in the interval; neither did it make too many concessions to modern ideas of comfort, even although it had passed into the hands of a stockbroker from Paris, M. Arthur Jacob. He died in the summer of 1914, but his widow was still living there on September 5, with one of his sons, a nurse, and a considerable domestic staff.

All the domestics with the exception of the nurse left the castle on the first rumour of invasion. M. Jacob, junior, in spite of the serious condition of his health, courageously determined to stay at Mondement, where he took the place of his brother as Mayor

<sup>1</sup> Abbé Millard, *Histoire de Sézanne*.

of the Commune, his brother having been called up. M. Jacob's fine example of civilian courage was to cost him dear. He was joined by an unexpected guest, Abbé Robin, the curé of Reuves, during the night of September 5. French troops had been quartered at Reuves on the 4th, but they had only passed through. They returned at three o'clock on the afternoon of the 5th; the order to hold the debouches south of the marshes had just come, and a half-battery of artillery took up its position behind the village and almost at once entered into action. The German artillery replied: the inhabitants went down into their cellars. But "towards two o'clock in the morning," other French troops, who had "come from Villevenard,"<sup>1</sup> marched through Reuves, raising an alarm as they passed." All that remained of the population dispersed; Abbé Robin, expecting to find a safe refuge at Mondement, set off there in the middle of the night. The castle was already occupied by our troops; he had to treat with them and was allowed to sleep in the court till morning, when, through the intervention of Mme. Jacob, he was allowed access to the living-rooms.

The arrival of this new guest was a great comfort to Mme. Jacob; she welcomed him as a messenger from Heaven; she wished to hear mass, and the Abbé celebrated in the neighbouring church. It was as yet hardly daylight; wisps of cloud still trailed over the little hills. A hollow sound was heard through the mist, and shrapnel burst over the church. The Abbé and

<sup>1</sup> This must be interpreted rather as "from the direction of Villevenard," for our troops did not enter the village till September 10.

his parishioner hurried back to the castle. The court and the common rooms, which had so lately appeared as vast, crowded barracks, were emptied in the twinkling of an eye : the troops had disappeared into the woods. The cannonade did not lessen by one shell, but the German projectiles passed above the castle to search the coverts of the Châtaigneraie, where our colonial artillery had installed its guns on the outskirts of the wood. The French fire lessened for a time ; it regained its intensity towards 11 o'clock, when the three batteries of the Geiger group had taken up their positions to the south-east of Reuves. Reassured by the inactivity of the German artillery at Mondement, Abbé Robin and his little band came out of the cellars in which they had taken refuge. The rest of the day passed very quietly. " In the evening," writes the Abbé, " we lay down on the top of our beds, fully dressed. The soldiers had come back to the court of the castle ; they left it again at daybreak."

Before setting himself to attack the castle, the enemy, being unable to extinguish the fire of our artillery, had no doubt wished to clear his approaches. In order to seize Mondement it was necessary to begin by dislodging the French from Reuves, Oyes and some wooded hills which the Morocco division still occupied towards Saint-Prix. (The Morocco division had replaced the 42nd division on this part of our line.) The German attack might be launched from three different directions : from the southern border of the marshes, when it would confront the French line ; from the converging roads of Soizy-aux-Bois and la Villeneuve,



when it would attack the French in the rear ; or from the loops of the Saint-Prix road, winding about among the woods of Grandes-Garennes and Botrait, when it would take the French in the flank.

This last menace seemed the most imminent. The enemy had already occupied Montalard since nine o'clock, and was pushing forward towards the Signal du Poirier and the wood of Saint-Gond. On the evening of September 6, however, we still held all, or nearly all, our positions of the day before, on the left and in the centre of our line.

On our left, our hold on la Villeneuve had certainly been loosened for a short time. Colonel (now General) Deville had set out from la Villeneuve at three in the morning with two of his battalions in the direction of Pommerose, to the south of the Petit-Morin, which had been assigned to him as his eventual objective. His 3rd battalion, under Major Morphous, remained between la Villeneuve and Charleville, forming a link with the Xth corps : the 94th regiment and the chasseurs held themselves in reserve towards Chapton, ready to follow the movement, when, towards six o'clock in the morning, the colonel was forewarned by a cavalry officer reconnoitring in the north, that enemy artillery was advancing rapidly by Corfélix and the Culots. This force consisted in reality of armoured cars. The three groups of divisional artillery which supported the movement of Deville's column immediately opened fire in their direction. But the tornado swept past, enfilading a battalion on the right of the 151st regiment and causing a general oscillation over

## The 6th of September 39

our front, which left Colonel Boichut and his artillery brigades uncovered.

The 151st regiment reoccupied Villeneuve towards 9.30, but without being able to debouch from the cemetery, which the enemy covered with his machine-guns. The church presently caught fire ; at six o'clock in the evening, a discordant jangle, of which the vibrations penetrated even to the cellars where the population had taken refuge, announced the fall of the bells. This constituted, in this particular region of the battle front, the enemy's one success, unable as he was to debouch from Charleville. Boichut's artillery, which had succeeded in extricating itself, had established its batteries behind la Villeneuve, to the north of le Bout-de-la-Ville and towards the wood of Saint-Gond. Colonel Coffec's two groups (Majors Desbuissons and Desrousseaux) poured down a steady fire on the "national road 51," along which reinforcements were being pushed forward to the aid of the Hanoverians, who were hotly engaged with the 162nd regiment before Soizy. In the Branle wood, the 94th and the 16th battalions of chasseurs (Major Cheneble) did not lose even a gun-carriage. Grossetti, who had held the Soizy road, the tactical centre of the battle, during the greater part of the day, used the farm at Chapton as his headquarters.

The same oscillations, the same final rearrangement took place in our centre. We could certainly not have taken Congy. Sautel's battalion had found Coizard and Joches empty <sup>1</sup> on the evening of the 5th,

<sup>1</sup> "Empty" is perhaps not quite the right word. "On the night of the 5th," writes Captain de Sales de Sabales, one of the last surviving

and had commenced to march obliquely on Congy, when it was caught by the searchlights stationed in the vineyards of Courjeonnet : <sup>1</sup> our men were blinded by the glare and unable to reply to the fire of the enemy who remained in the shadow, while offering him, in this luminous field, the most obliging of targets. The battalion fell back on Joches to await the dawn. The 3rd Zouaves under Colonel Lévêque had just entered Joches with the Schneider and Martin brigades of artillery, which had ventured, under cover of night, along the straight high-road of Anglure. At the sight of these protecting forces, the inhabitants who

officers of the 1st battalion of the 1st Zouaves who fought at Saint-Gond, "Sautel's battalion flung itself on the Death's Head Hussars at Coizard, where they were quartered for the night. When we entered the village at six o'clock in the morning, we found some of their horses still there."

<sup>1</sup> According to a local tradition, it was at Courjeonnet on September 6 that a general of the guard, Prince Hans von Wittenau, was severely wounded. "He was at once removed," says Abbé Néret, "at two o'clock in the morning to the Auban-Moët Hospital at Épernay, where Dr. Verron attended him for four days." Now, at the beginning of the invasion, September 5, Épernay had been ordered to pay a war levy of 176,550 francs. On the 9th, this whole sum was refunded "in consideration," wrote General von Plettenberg, "of the care taken of the German wounded, and in the hope that such care will be continued." Such an act of generosity on the part of the enemy gives the more cause for astonishment that it is unique. Many conjectures and stories have grown up round it : it has been alleged that Dr. Verron, who attended the Prince von Wittenau, had fixed his fee at the sum of 176,550 francs. "All those who are acquainted with this eminent surgeon," write the authors of *La Guerre en Champagne*, "know that the dignity of his character, the high ideals he has always cherished of his profession and his duty, protest against any such allegation."

## The 6th of September 41

had stayed in the village thought themselves saved ; they shouted and sang for joy. It was with some difficulty that they were calmed down.

"We are sacrificed in advance," the soldiers told them. "But the welfare of the country demands it. If you see us advancing towards Congy, you will know that all is well. If not . . ."

They completed the sentence by a vague gesture, an invitation to these poor people not to build too much on illusory hopes.<sup>1</sup>

A new day had dawned. The artillery had succeeded in establishing a battery on Hill 176, between Joches and Courjeonnet. But the Congy road, swept by bursts of enemy fire, presented no shelter save the trees planted along its border. In addition to all this, Toulon-la-Montagne, on the right flank of the French attack, had become untenable for its garrison. From the surrounding hills, which enclosed it on three sides like a horse-shoe, the enemy shattered it with his heavy guns. The trees on the crest of the Razet wood cracked and fell over, as if under a cyclone. Our scouts signalled regarding suspected footpaths through the Cubersault valley and the meadows of Gravelle, where the Eon brigade had failed to carry the castle in a night attack. The investment of the position continued. At nine o'clock the enemy crept away into the wood ; at 9.30, cut to pieces by his machine-guns, the 2nd battalion of the 135th rushed down the slopes of Toulon-la-Montagne, drawing into its helter-skelter retreat the Noblet

<sup>1</sup> From the account of Mme. Bression, the farmer's wife at Joches.

battalion, which had occupied Vert-la-Gravelle. The Blondlat brigade was left alone, between Courjeonnet and Joches. And it was at that moment that Foch's orders were most pressing. He not only commanded that Toulon should be held at all costs, but he ordered that Congy should be taken and that an advance should be made in the west towards Baye, in liaison with the 42nd division. Was it not Foch who had written in his *Principes de Guerre* that "to maintain positions was to prepare implicitly for defeat, if nothing further was attempted, if the offensive was not at once assumed" ? Dubois, with the IXth corps, at once began the necessary preparations to realise the idea of his chief. While the skirmishing troops of Colonels Cros and Fellert pushed forward in the direction of Baye, supported by two brigades of artillery in batteries to the south of Reuves, Dubois pushed the 33rd brigade forward from Broussy-le-Grand to Broussy-le-Petit ; he had the roads across the marshes barred by the 52nd reserve division, and he charged the 17th division with the task of recapturing Toulon and Vert-la-Gravelle.

It was a heavy task, but not too heavy for the regiment to which it was assigned. Launched forth from Bannes at 10.45 on a road uncompromisingly straight and level, bordered by quaking meadows from which the enemy poured forth a constant frontal and cross-fire—how could the 77th regiment (under Colonel Lestoquoi) succeed in crossing the marshes and entering Coizard ? Shells rained down on them from every side. One section, told off to make a reconnaissance at

## The 6th of September 43

Joches, was received by a hail of bullets and cut off from its main force by a heavy artillery barrage.<sup>1</sup> From the houses of Coizard the enemy shot at our troops through loop-holes. There was an instant's hesitation, a momentary recoil.

"Colonel," said one of the officers, "it is all up with us."

"Not yet," replied Colonel Lestoquoi.

He brought his troops back to the little square in front of the *Mairie*. The firing was just then particularly violent. The men hesitated again. But Major de Beaufort, "mounted on his great charger, a riding-switch in his hand," inspired them with the ardour of his own courage.

"Forward! my lads! Courage!" he cried to them. "Without stumbling! Without lowering your heads! It is for France! Joan of Arc is with us!"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That section was commanded by a non-commissioned officer, now Lieutenant Roy. "Roy, who was charged with making a reconnaissance at Joches," writes a contemporary, "was received with a volley of point-blank rifle-shots in front, an artillery barrage in the rear. He was able, nevertheless, to disengage his force, rallying with the help of Sergeant-Major Bignon, who has since been promoted, a hundred men of the 77th regiment, a few tirailleurs, and some zouaves. Cut off from the rest of the regiment, he fell back and did everything in his power to regain his place in the battalion; without information and without a map, he succeeded in rejoining his regiment at noon on the following day, September 7, having covered nearly twenty kilometres."

<sup>2</sup> "At Coizard Major de Beaufort, mounted on his great bay charger, a riding-switch in his hand, encouraged his troops. Shells were falling all round, bullets whistled from the houses where the Boche was in hiding. 'Forward, my lads! Courage!' cried the major. 'Without stumbling! With heads held high!' But they were obliged to fall

Carried forward by the warlike mysticism of that voice, the 2nd battalion went right through to Coizard, and by the Crayère—the ancient course of the Marne, which offered them a momentary shelter—tried to reach the steep slopes of Toulon-la-Montagne by climbing up the mountain side. The 3rd battalion, under Major Limal, attempted a similar manoeuvre towards the south-western boundary of the woods. At seven o'clock they were overpowered. The retreat by the marshes was terrible ;<sup>1</sup> “ the waste of rushes extended for a distance of nearly three kilometres. It was impossible to follow the road where troops would have been sighted at once by the enemy, and in the rushes the men sank in sometimes to the waist. The 58th battalion of chasseurs, summoned hastily by Moussy to parry the effects of this retreat, found great difficulty in deploying under the bursting shells, so frequent and in such

back. The retreat was terrible across the marshes, where the men sank in sometimes up to their waists, under a withering fire. But Beaufort did not cease to encourage his soldiers. They entrenched themselves that evening (September 6) on Mont-Août, near the big quarries, which looked ghostly in the night. In the marshes, a village was in flames ; one could distinguish the shadows which moved round it ; the Boches were dancing an infernal saraband. The night was fine, but hot. As there was no water obtainable in that region, the men suffered, and were to suffer still more, from thirst as well as from hunger.” (Letter from a private soldier, E. C.)

<sup>1</sup> Major Limal was wounded in this operation. Captain Nanteuil, who was also wounded, heroically refused to allow himself to be removed, lest he should in that way hinder the retreat. He was brought in shortly afterwards by the 68th infantry regiment (Colonel Genot), which rescued at the same time some men of a section of the 12th company of the 3rd battalion (commanded by Adjutant Pasquier), who had fallen into the hands of the enemy. See Appendix.

## The 6th of September 45

quantities that a veil of blackish smoke from Coizard and Joches obscured the position.”<sup>1</sup> The “grey tunics poured down the hills in dense masses at the heels of our men, and penetrated right on to the marshes. French shells now began to fall among them, but, hardly broken, the ‘rushing flood’ of the grey uniforms re-formed; the enemy was in Bannes!”

But to debouch from it again—that was another matter. The batteries of our 17th division (the Lavenir, Bourdiaux and Lesquem groups) laid down, under the orders of Colonel Besse, so exact a barrage, that in spite of the shouts of the German officers, the *Hurrahs!* and the *Vorwärts!* the ranks of the Guard were broken, the Germans hesitated, turned back. Four attempts failed in this way.<sup>2</sup> The day was drawing to a close. Though our reinforcements arrived, the situation remained precarious till far on in the evening. . . . But at Morains, Nacquart’s battalion of the 32nd regiment, in liaison with the 65th of the IXth corps, held their positions firmly all through the day and night, under an intense bombardment. At Aulnay-aux-Planches, a company of the 77th regiment held on grimly till the morning of the 7th, keeping a footing for us on the northern border of the marshes. Pressed back everywhere except from this border, the IXth corps fell back to re-form on its old line, which was but slightly bent. From Oyes and from Reuves, by the Haut-des-Grès and Mont-Août, it ascended again to the north towards the boundaries of Bannes, where

<sup>1</sup> Henri Libermann, *Ce qu’a vu un officier de chasseurs à pied* (Plon-Nourrit).

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*



3000 shells of every calibre had not succeeded in dislodging the 33rd brigade, which had hastened to the rescue and had entrenched itself on the outskirts of the village at Champ-de-Bataille and at la Petite-Ferme, facing the Coizard and Morains roads.<sup>1</sup> "Everything is going well," wrote Moussy at 9.30 in the evening. But Moussy, who commanded this sector for the time being, did not try to conceal that certain incidents of the day had given him grave anxiety. If at the beginning some confusion existed among the various units of the liaison, the XIth corps, on our right, did not waste any time in putting things straight.<sup>2</sup> But the enemy had no cause to disturb himself: Morains-le-Petit, Normée, Lenharrée, Chapelaine, Vassimont, Haussimont and Sommesous were burning; Écury-le-Repos, at the bend of the Somme and under the fire of two artilleries, was no longer tenable after the middle of the day. "On the 6th and 7th," writes an officer of

<sup>1</sup> "Support of the 52nd reserve division (58th chasseurs battalion). . . . We were back in a little valley south of Bannes from 2.30 till 5.30, constantly deluged by projectiles. At 6.45 our direction was Bannes-Broussy, towards the wood . . . from which the 33rd brigade debouched to occupy Hill 154, Bannes, Champ-de-Bataille, Petite-Ferme. . . ." (General Moussy's Journal of the Campaign.)

<sup>2</sup> According to M. Gervais-Courtellemont, "our heavy artillery, which arrived hurriedly by forced marches, had not been able to get forward to the first line since the beginning of the battle: the 20th artillery, for example, whose batteries covered seventy kilometres without a halt, from Troyes to Connantray, in order to reach the battle-field. Our infantry, in spite of its splendid spirit, was thus in a difficult position at the beginning of the action." (*Les Champs de bataille de la Marne*.) But this is chiefly the case in regard to the IXth corps, which had left the third and fourth groups of the 49th artillery in Lorraine, an absence keenly felt in these first days.

## The 6th of September 47

the 347th regiment,<sup>1</sup>—“the enemy shelled us at his pleasure; and I think it was during these two days, which seemed to me like centuries, that I felt most down-hearted. One could see nothing, and every moment Bang! Bang! Bang! to the right, to the left, in front, behind. And the cries of the wounded and the dying; the shouts of the officers, trying to make themselves heard above the uproar. What a Hell!”

The same officer speaks feelingly of the vast warrens among which he bivouacked. It was the district called Champagne-Pouilleuse. Its agricultural poverty prolongs that of the marshes. The eye finds no resting place in these great flats of pale and crumbling earth, like a dust of dry bones. On the least barren parts one sees patches of gorse, fields of barley, lucerne, buckwheat; a sorry culture, broken here and there by plantations of little firs and stunted birch trees. Chalk appears everywhere, and the pines, the least exacting of trees, find only just enough sustenance to keep them in life, and only attain to a diminutive and sickly growth. One can walk for leagues without seeing a single farm. There are hardly any cattle, a few sheep herded by an old shepherd in a rough brownish smock. The melancholy of this district in the autumn must be extreme, when the wind sweeps the rusty pine-needles off the trees and strews them on the ground, when flights of cranes, their necks outstretched, fly across the sky on their way south. It is almost the melancholy of certain parts of Brittany, such as the immense plain of Lanvaux,

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Second-Lieutenant Firmin M . . . (*Courrier de Sézanne* of September 10, 1915.)

which is also almost uncultivated, and sparsely covered with fir trees. But it is a drier melancholy, without the constant mists, without running water. And, strangely enough, the troops who were fighting here were troops from Vannes (116th) and from Lorient (62nd). The thousands of German and French graves, set all along the road to Lenharrée, tell the traveller—to whom they form a tragic escort on each side of the road—one of the results of the battle. Lenharrée—the very name suggests Brittany. A little later, after the surprise of the 8th, other men from western regiments were to fall here too, men of the 19th from Brest, of the 248th from Guingamp, of the 247th from St. Malo, mixed with men of the 225th from Cherbourg. The storm once past, the ancient courage of the race reasserted itself. "It is necessary either to conquer these people, or to kill them," Foch is reported to have said to his Bretons, in speaking of the "grenadiers of old Prussia." "Very good," they replied simply.<sup>1</sup> It was l'Espée's division in a short engagement of one of his brigades (that of Séréville) with Saxon cavalry supported by infantry and artillery which first gave evidence of the fierce fighting spirit of his squadrons.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "His" Bretons! The possessive pronoun was used by Abbé Nérét; it is surprising in view of the fact that Foch is a native of the Pyrenees, but it becomes more intelligible when one learns that Foch married into a Breton family, and that his favourite residence is on the outskirts of Morlaix, in the Finistère district.

<sup>2</sup> "On that day, l'Espée's division found itself at first near Soudé-Sainte-Croix. During the day it had retreated towards Poivres-Sainte-Suzanne, after having sent a regiment to make a reconnaissance at Coole, but, contrary to the report of M. Babin, there had been no engagement in this region. The only action fought that day by the division was fought by Séréville's brigade at Vatry, where it had been





THE CHURCH AND BRIDGE OF ST. PRIX  
*From a drawing by Emile Genet*

## The 6th of September 49

On the evening of the 6th, an appreciable recoil was to be marked in one sector only of the French centre. And it was a momentary recoil. Bannes (or rather the nearest part of it, for the one street of the village is nearly a kilometre in length) no longer belonged to us. The enemy had got a footing on the southern border of the marshes, but he only held one road-head, and successive masses of his troops tried in vain to scale the slopes of Mont-Août, a solitary articulation of the front, like an island, which the 52nd reserve division put in a state of defence, and which from its height of 221 metres dominated the vast marshy flats. Up till the end of the battle, except for a few hours on the afternoon of the 9th, Mont-Août remained in the hands of the French, and the IXth corps found it the most solid of bastions. Foch, in revising during the night his order of the 7th, could speak without exaggeration of "results obtained against an experienced and daring enemy."<sup>1</sup>

sent at 6.30 in the morning with a group of cyclists of the 25th dragoons. During the morning there were only patrol engagements. After mid-day, the German infantry gained the woods and commenced to attack, but the Sérévile brigade held firm until the enemy brought up his artillery. Sérévile had not a single gun to oppose it; the cyclists fell back under shrapnel fire on Sommesous. The enemy, whom the dragoons continued to harry, did not go further than Vatry. The brigade spent the night at Sommesous (evacuated by the XIth corps), which it found in an indescribable state of disorder; the main part of the division was at Mailly and at Poivres." (Letter from General X . . .)

<sup>1</sup> "The major-general counts on all the troops of the Ninth Army displaying the greatest activity and the most untiring energy, to extend and maintain, in unquestionable manner, the results obtained against an experienced and daring enemy." (Order of the Day, September 7.)

## III

## THE 7TH OF SEPTEMBER

IN spite of the salient which the enemy had thrust into our lines, the straightness of our front was not seriously affected. A glance at the map will show the reader that on the morning of September 7, Mondement resembled a great promontory assailed from three sides, but which through Oyes, Reuves and Broussy preserved still a sufficiently large front towards the marshes. On the right, the enemy exerted pressure on it from Bannes ; on the left, in spite of the heroism of the 162nd regiment of the line, he had infiltrated in by the slopes of l'Homme Blanc and Soizy-le-Bois, of which we now only held the village ; in front he threatened from the Botrait wood, from which, on the previous night, the Ligny and Fralon battalions of Cros' regiment had not arrived in time to dislodge him, after having captured the farm of Montalard at the price of serious losses. The enemy retook it at dawn, and with it, towards 8 o'clock, the Signal du Poirier, a vast bare chalky hill riddled with deep trenches, horse-shoe excavations and battery emplacements from which his fire belched forth on Reuves and Oyes. Between Soizy and Charleville, we ourselves occupied the salient of la Villeneuve-lès-Charleville and were in direct liaison with the army of Franchet d'Espérey, who, warned of the danger with

## The 7th of September 51

which the infiltration of von Bülow's troops threatened the 42nd division, had ordered the Xth corps during the night to engage the enemy on the right and free that part of the line.

But owing to a mistake, which represented this corps as being in a critical position and on the point of being forced to retire, Grossetti at the same time caused the 151st regiment to evacuate la Villeneuve, because he feared its left flank would be left uncovered ; he also ordered Colonel Deville to fall back on the wood to the south, while maintaining his liaison with the 94th regiment. This retreat was carried out in echelons, without noise or commotion, and at seven o'clock the next morning there was no longer one French soldier at la Villeneuve. At that moment a counter-order from Grossetti arrived. Better informed as to the situation of the Xth corps, he now ordered Colonel Deville to suspend his retreating movement. But it was too late ; all that could now be done was to attempt the recapture of la Villeneuve at as little cost as possible and after a thorough artillery preparation by the Ménétrier and Alvin brigades. The enemy had destroyed the road from Chaption to la Villeneuve by his shell-fire. Moreover, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the Ménétrier brigade, which had been detached to go to the support of the Morocco division, was obliged to abandon this task in order to undertake another near Mondement—to enter into action against enemy batteries installed on the crest of the Poirier Hill, whence they were causing great havoc among our troops.



It was not till the evening that the 151st regiment was able to re-enter la Villeneuve which the enemy, ignorant of our retreat, had continued to bombard. A new brigade of artillery (Aubertin) had taken up its position to the south-west of the wood of Bout-de-la-Ville. While helping forward our advance, the fire it directed on the approaches of Charleville supported effectively an energetic movement of the Xth corps decided on at midday, which won for the French, towards six o'clock, the Rue-le-Comte and the Recoude, the "Écartes" or outskirts of Charleville.<sup>1</sup> The forest of Gault was not yet completely cleared of Germans. At the point called Clos-le-Roi in particular, the 70th regiment of Vitré suffered heavy losses.<sup>2</sup> But on the whole the driving-out of the enemy was going on satisfactorily. Of the thousand prisoners taken during the day by Franchet d'Espérey's forces, more than half were taken by the 41st regiment from Rennes, commanded by Colonel Passaga; it collected in the forest of Gault and on the boundaries of Chatelot and Guébarré, 550 men, 6 machine-guns, and 2200 rifles.<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to this diversion, the pressure became less heavy on our left towards Soizy-aux-Bois<sup>4</sup> where the

<sup>1</sup> The villages and hamlets of Champagne, which are dependants of a commune, are called *écartes*.

<sup>2</sup> A shell-hole beside the Clos-le-Roi road at Gault bears this inscription: "Here perished four brave French officers. Pray for them." The officers were Captain Guillain, Lieutenants Chevrinet and Basselly, and Second-Lieutenant Richard, all belonging to the 70th regiment.

<sup>3</sup> And more than 400 wounded. Cf. Dr. V . . ., *En suivant les soldats de l'Ouest (Ouest-Éclair of February 3, 1917)*.

<sup>4</sup> "At the foot of the wooded heights which dominate the north of

## The 7th of September 53

162nd were still heavily engaged. But in the morning <sup>1</sup> the effects of this diversion had not yet made themselves felt. Punished by heavy artillery established at Chenaille and Andecy, the 162nd, even although supported by the two artillery brigades of Colonel Coffec, the one near Chaption, the other near the Ferme-des-Épées, had not been able to debouch from Soizy. The village was on fire. At eleven o'clock the 162nd was obliged to abandon Soizy and fall back on the castle of Chaption where the 16th battalion of chasseurs, detached to support it, helped to defend the park. Colonel Margot was seriously wounded at the Branle wood, where the 94th and a battalion of the 151st flanked the left of the 162nd, which had several times been obliged to rally its disconnected units with the help of the cavalry. The concentric fire of the German batteries made this wood a veritable nest of shells; it became every moment more evident that the enemy sought to cut off the 42nd division from the main French army.

This explained the relative respite he accorded to our central artillery duel. From the two lines of heights which rose from the borders of the marshes, the opposing batteries shelled each other reciprocally. Our

the village, great tombs are arranged in lines. They bear witness to the furious nature of the battles which were waged by the brave men of the 162nd, the 6th colonial, the 19th and 8th *chasseurs-à-pied*, the 5th and 7th *tirailleurs*, the 94th of the line and the 2nd *zouaves*, who sleep side by side under the folds of the tricolour." (Gervais-Courtellemont, *Les Champs de bataille de la Marne*.)

<sup>1</sup> It was towards midday that the co-operation of the Xth corps became actually effective. The news was brought to the knowledge of the troops at 1.30.

aeroplanes had gone to seek out the emplacement of the German batteries that morning. We had fired from the heights of Mondement, of Broyes, of Mont-Août, while from the plain two of our brigades kept a guard on the debouches of Saint-Prix; two others towards Bannes guarded the debouches of Coizard and of Morains. The Germans fired from Chenaille, Congy, Courjeonnet, Toulon and Mont-Aimé, the wooded hollows of which offered favourable cover for their heavy guns. The shells crossed each other above the marshes, but the enemy artillery had a longer range than ours, and we had to cope with his destructive fire by increased mobility. Towards eleven o'clock, after an aerial reconnaissance by the Germans, a fierce howitzer fire decimated the gun-crew of Captain Boisricheux's 5th battery, and he was obliged to fall back. The other batteries suffered no less. Lieutenant Gripon of the 4th fell mortally wounded; Lieutenant Caron of the 6th, though wounded, remained at his post; the commanding officer of the Geiger squadron received a more serious injury and had to hand over the command of the brigade to Captain Naud. The general impression among the troops was that the enemy had the superiority in gun-power.<sup>1</sup> All over the hills, telephone wires, laid on the bare ground, put his observers in

<sup>1</sup> "The fighting on the 6th did not seem to me to be decisive. On the 7th, the enemy established a superiority of gun-power over us. He increased it on the 8th." (Diary of Lieutenant Alouis, attached to the major commanding the 2nd brigade of the 49th artillery.) Captain de Boisricheux, mentioned above, was killed in May, 1915, the second-lieutenant of the battery in 1916; Lieutenant Croix of the same battery was wounded on August 30, 1914.

## The 7th of September 55

communication with his batteries. M. Roland also observed during the night "little luminous globes below the emplacements of these batteries, signals of course, of a pinkish colour, which were doubtless not visible to our observers." If the German artillery did experience a shortage of munitions on the Marne, it was certainly not apparent yet ;<sup>1</sup> his shots, in comparison with ours, were in a proportion of five to one. The big shells of the 150 mm. guns made a noise like an advancing siren and wrung cries of fury from our men. " Ah, Germany ! " exclaimed an old major reproachfully, his eyes turned up to the sky, every time one of these monsters roared past overhead.

The enemy reserves in the villages, absorbed in less lyrical necessities, proceeded to minute domiciliary requisitions. " As we had eaten nothing for four days," one of the German deserters<sup>2</sup> confessed, " the order had been given to seize all food that could be found." As a matter of fact, everything was taken, even the money from the tills.<sup>3</sup> After which, as at Villevenard,

<sup>1</sup> M. Gervais-Courtellemont estimates the number of large-calibre shells (150) which the heavy guns from Villevenard vomited forth on the plateau of Mondement, the village, the farm, and the castle, at " more than 20,000."

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Abbé Millard. " They were dying of hunger," says the mother-superior of the convent at Andecy. " They had been told, ' Look for something to eat.' They stole anything they could find."

<sup>3</sup> " We went back to the house. What devastation ! The windows broken by shrapnel, the old firearms, which had been taken to the *Mairie*, lying broken in the court, the flag of the fire-brigade and the tricolour ribbon from the bust of the Republic torn to pieces, the old sabres of the fire-brigade bent, the cash-box of the schools forced open and the contents stolen, the finest pieces of the collection carried away ;

## 56 Foch at the Marne

where the cash-box of the school had been robbed . . .<sup>1</sup>

The officers reserved the castles, ancient and modern, the aristocratic crown of the marshes, for themselves. They did not burn them all, like those of Mondement and Chapelaine, but they robbed them all without exception, from the charming castle of Congy, which belonged to M. Patenôtre, to the castle of Baye with its mouse-eaten towers, the birthplace of Marion de Lorme, which suffered a systematic robbery, testified to by the inscription on the door of the chief apartments of the name of the Duke of Brunswick, the son-in-law of William II.<sup>2</sup> These

silver bracelets, gold rings, bronze and copper coins, ancient and modern medals (thirty Roman coins, Romulus-Remus, Ceres, Augustine, the Children and the Wolf, Louis the Fair, Bonaparte at the Pyramids, Cross of a pontifical soldier, Cross of the Legion of Honour of 1830, Academic palms, the agricultural *Croix du Mérite*, silver, silver-gilt, and bronze medals, rare 5 franc pieces, etc.). Everything was removed, from the cellar to the granary. Empty wine, lemonade and Vichy water bottles lay everywhere. We walked over piles of broken dishes, and over the remains of their orgies—watches, bracelets, and a quantity of other things that escape the memory. A secret drawer of the bureau in the drawing-room forced open and burned. Shirts had been taken away, with a quantity of other linen, from the overturned drawers. The violin, the phonograph, the magic lantern had been broken, a child's money-box forced open and emptied. No coin escaped the covetous investigations of the barbarians, who had a lust for gold, silver, and any rare and valuable objects." (Journal of M. Roland.)

<sup>1</sup> The details which follow here of the conduct of the German soldiers at Fromentières are too disgusting for repetition. (Translator's Note.)

<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for the report on the robbery committed at Baye.

## The 7th of September 57

wholesale robberies, less dangerous, but no less painful than the war of movement, gave rise to much heart-burning and bitterness.

On the eve of the battle of the Marne, the German throat evidently felt itself capable of absorbing the whole of Champagne. It was not only at table that the corks popped ; according to the inhabitants of this district, the German officers, wherever they went, were followed by wheelbarrows and perambulators full of bottles of champagne, which they emptied as they went along. Pitiless in regard to their cellars, they nevertheless showed themselves good-natured towards the persons of the inhabitants. Atrocities were committed in the Marne, as in Lorraine and in Belgium, but to a lesser extent, and nearly always by isolated groups of soldiers.<sup>1</sup> The troops had evidently received orders that this population of wine-growers was not to be too much aggravated, just as they had received orders to respect the vines themselves in view of the next vintage, which was to be the " vintage of the Kaiser." There was no uncertainty, no fear in the hearts of these men in regard to the issue of the struggle. They were not even astonished by the resistance offered by the French ; " the last efforts, they thought, of the creature in its death-struggle." To-morrow, this evening, perhaps, the shouts of victory would be heard. And immediately afterwards the entry into Paris would follow, the final scene. On the slopes of Chenaille, where he was guarding some dug-outs, a German soldier, about thirty-five years of age, of a " grave and

<sup>1</sup> See in the Appendix the official report on these atrocities.

almost timid expression," drew his watch out of its horn case before the schoolmaster, and indicating the hours with his finger, said, "Midday here—Paris there?" "In your imagination perhaps," replied M. Roland: "Paris is five kilometres beyond the marshes, and Frenchmen are defending the approaches to the capital."

But before taking Paris it was necessary for the enemy to take Mondement, the plateau of Sézanne, the line of the Aube, and things were not moving so quickly as the naïveté of the Germans expected. The 42nd division was still holding its ground between the forest of Gault and Soizy-aux-Bois. No sacrifice was too great for it, nor for the Xth corps: the second line regiment alone had lost its commander, Colonel Pérez, half of its officers, and nearly two-thirds of its effectives before Charleville. But the enemy's losses were still more severe. Grossetti, who commanded the Verdun division, was as fine a general as Humbert who commanded the 1st active Morocco division. Grossetti was a massive Corsican,<sup>1</sup> whose imperturbable tranquillity under shell-fire had given rise—in the case of Gustavus Adolphus—to a legend of invulnerability; he already gave promise of that

<sup>1</sup> General Grossetti, who commanded the 42nd division from August 28 till November 8, 1914, was born at Paris, but was of Corsican descent according to some accounts, though others claim for him an Italian origin. "It is to him," wrote one of the most brilliant of our officers, placed under his command, "it is to him that we owe the dogged resistance of Foch's left wing, while waiting for the arrival of the Xth corps. He proved his splendid qualities of command and of endurance at that time."

## The 7th of September 59

semi-fabulous figure, the "Bull of the Yser," the future victor of Pervyse and of Ramscappelle. Not content with having extended our positions round la Villeneuve, he was anxious to recapture Soizy and Saint-Prix, with the help of the Morocco brigade, which, however, had just been forced to abandon Oyes, on the outskirts of which the enemy had organised a powerful fort, liberally supplied with field guns. These audacious backward and forward movements were called by Grossetti "weaving" operations. But in the meantime Dubois had sent the 77th, the best of his regiments which was for the moment disengaged, to Humbert; in reserve at Allemant it supplied him eventually with valuable support. The co-operation of the Morocco division was thus made possible, and at five o'clock in the evening the attack was launched towards the wood of Saint-Gond by the tirailleurs of Colonel Cros, and towards the Branle wood and Soizy by the 42nd division. On both fronts the attack hurled itself against a wall of shells,<sup>1</sup> but it held the enemy,

<sup>1</sup> "At four o'clock in the afternoon the 16th chasseur regiment had already attempted an offensive on the crest to the north of the Castle of Chapton. Caught in the flank by machine-gun fire, it stopped and dug itself in. From five till seven o'clock the 94th counter-attacked in its turn, to retake the lost ground, but without success. During the night it bivouacked near the park and farm of Chapton. . . . However hard the day's fighting and marching had been for the 42nd division, one can imagine how opportune was the movement which brought it in the direction of Soizy-la-Villeneuve. A few hours later, and the Germans would have forced their way south, finally turning the marshes of Saint-Gond on the west, while the French Army Corps to the east would have bent under the pressure. The tenacity of the troops was above all praise. If ground had been ceded at Chapton or



and imposed on him a defensive attitude. Mondement, for some hours at least, was saved.

The position of the castle had not ceased to be critical up to that time. The enemy, attacking in the wood of Saint-Gond at break of day, had, after a struggle of two hours, thrown back the troops of Colonel Cros and the units of Fellert's regiment which supported them, towards Oyes. Humbert had been obliged to summon the Blondlat brigade from the Broussys, where it had been able to leave only a covering screen of troops by reason of the enemy's feeble resistance on our centre. With the Sautel and Lachèze battalions the front was hastily organised between Montgivroux and Mondement. But even this front could only feebly cover the position, against which the enemy was exerting his greatest effort. Three of our batteries installed near the castle searched the woods from which the enemy was expected to debouch in serried masses, with heavy fire. The Germans had not yet replied to our fire. They were probably bringing up their heavy guns. It was not till nine o'clock that the first shell fell on the castle and destroyed part of the wall near one of the corner towers. Other shells fell on the wings, then on the roof, which blew up in an explosion.<sup>1</sup> The fire lessened a little

at la Villeneuve, a disaster might well have occurred. 'Whether you are at la Villeneuve or at the wood of Bout-de-la-Ville,' said the liaison officer of the Fifth Army to General Grossetti, 'does not matter. The essential thing is that you hold firm. If you hold, all is well.' (Journal of General X . . .)

<sup>1</sup> "Three batteries emplaced beside us opened fire in the direction of Talus. The Germans did not reply at once. Towards nine o'clock

## The 7th of September 61

towards midday. Humbert arrived then, fresh from the battle, his appetite sharpened for revenge by the long circuit he had been obliged to make in order to reach our lines. "He has just lunched," writes the Curé of Reuves. "He is in great spirits, alert and cheerful." It was amazing to the good ecclesiastic, who preferred a crust of brown bread in time of peace to any feast in the world served under shell-fire, to hear Humbert call for a tablecloth, for serviettes; to observe how he wished to do the honours of the table to all the "house of Jacob" in that great dining-hall. What a strange desire, and at such a time! But this gaiety, this cheerfulness under bombardment, was not a bad sign; the moral of the leader is a good criterion of the moral of his men. "He holds them in his hand," writes Abbé Robin; "his slightest wish is obeyed. It is enough for him to say, 'We must resist; the welfare of France demands it.'"

Every man understood. This defiance, almost foolhardiness of their chief, this absolute disdain for danger, was the best of tonics for his men. During the fiercest moments of the bombardment he was to be seen with his staff-officer, now at the foot of the towers, now beside the church, looking through his field-glasses at the great plain which lay stretched out at his feet,<sup>1</sup> and "where under a burning sun the 77th regiment was deploying in fan-shaped formation as a screen towards

their first shot destroyed part of the wall near the tower; from time to time, on both wings, there were explosions on the roof." (From the account of the Curé of Reuves.)

<sup>1</sup> Asker, *op. cit.*

Allemant." Humbert's openly showing himself in the danger zone may have been the "best of tonics" for his men, but it immediately attracted the enemy's fire towards Mondement: the enemy was bound to know that our headquarters was there. Lunch was hardly finished when the castle, the church, the fields and the roads were literally inundated by 105 and 150 mm. shells. M. Baur, the chief surgeon, who was watching the battle, leaning against a great elm tree, was killed instantaneously; the shell, exploding just beside him, mowed down tree and man at the same moment. Another shell fell on the general's escort, killing and wounding several of his cavalry. The roads became impracticable for motors. But Humbert remained cheerful, full of confidence. "The Germans," he said, "are bottled up. Mondement is the cork. It must hold firm at whatever cost." And in order that it should hold, Humbert was ready, if necessary, to sacrifice everything down to the last man, the last cartridge. His soldiers approved this determination of their chief. Death is lightly regarded in these days. At six o'clock Abbé Robin cautioned a group of zouaves, who were returning, black with powder, their bayonets twisted, to the castle. He asked them naïvely if they had "triumphed." "We have driven back the Germans," they replied; "but not far enough. To-morrow we will resume the offensive—or to-night."

They said nothing of the heavy losses they had suffered for a slight advance, and that in one "special action" alone. The course of this day's fighting had cost the French "five-sixths of the effectives of a force

## The 7th of September 63

of 1200 Moroccans.”<sup>1</sup> As Mondement seemed to be more and more drawing the enemy’s fire, Humbert was obliged, during the afternoon, to change his field headquarters to the boundary south of the wood, and his general headquarters to the Castle of Broyes,<sup>2</sup> which was both less exposed and more central. Broyes is an ancient barony, the powerful lords of which possessed in the eleventh century all the parish of Sézanne except the estate of Saint-Martin-de-Tours. The castle lies half-way between Oyes and Sézanne. It is a handsome building with a great porch and the high red-tiled roofs common to all the manor houses of the district. From the terrace of this castle the general could see the whole plain of the Aube as far as Troyes. It was no longer an episode but the whole battle which lay stretched before him, as if in relief on a large map. “In the evening, when night fell,” wrote Asker, a staff-officer, “the immense plain had a curious powdery effect, enveloped in a reddish copper-coloured cloud, in which everything was blended, as if in a vision of the Apocalypse—the last rays of the summer sun, the whirling clouds of dust raised by the guns, the infantry and the cavalry, the innumerable explosions of shells, the flames of the burning houses and villages. And how well one understood from the commanding height of this terrace that it was indispensable, essential, that our division should hold good !”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *La Guerre en Champagne*. But we do not think these figures can be accepted without further proof.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes called the *Château des Pucelles*.

<sup>3</sup> Asker, *op. cit.* Another combatant, E. C., a privatesoldier, expresses himself in almost identical terms : “The view from Broyes is superb.

It did hold good. The staff of the division in retiring, pressed, no doubt, by more immediate anxieties, had forgotten the poor civilians of Mondement, thrown by a caprice of Providence into the midst of this tornado of fire. But the castle continued to serve as a barracks for the soldiers, who did their best to reassure and calm their hosts. When the fusillade crackled a little nearer, they would explain to the inhabitants that "our guns" were firing. And the bombardment seemed to be quietening down; the worst of the storm seemed to be past. "The Germans must have been driven back," wrote Abbé Robin on the evening of the 7th. "At any rate we think they have been."

This optimism was to receive a rude shock in the night, but at that time there was nothing unreasonable in it. Though the enemy had taken Oyes, we had continued to occupy Reuves and the three Broussys, where the enemy contented himself with bombarding us, without developing a serious attack. He did not even take possession of Bannes. Indeed, it almost seemed at first as if he wished to neglect this route. Although it was hardly more than seven kilometres in a direct line from Bannes to Fère-Champenoise, he preferred, in marching on Fère, to use the main road which led to Morains and which gradually inclined towards the railway. But his progress on this sector of the front was not appreciable till midday.

How impressed one is with the importance of the Mondement position, in measuring with one's eye the plain which extends as far as Troyes! It is not without a shudder that one contemplates retreat from such a position."

## The 7th of September 65

A little before eight o'clock on the morning of the 7th, the Nacquart battalion had been obliged to evacuate Morains and fall back, threatened as it was with being cut off by enemy forces which advanced along the railway line with machine guns. At the same time, the company of the 77th which was guarding the flank at Aulnay-aux-Planches found itself obliged to recross the marshes.<sup>1</sup> The loss of Morains soon made itself felt. The German artillery was punishing us severely on that part of our front which acted as a hinge between the IXth and the XIth corps. Some wavering had been felt in these corps from the beginning of the bombardment ; it spread to the wings ; the enemy had his Guard there which he used as an arrow directed against our lines. Warned in time, General Radiguet, commanding the 21st division, opened fire on Morains ; in the evening, learning that the village was still occupied, and requiring water for his troops on the left, he asked Moussy, who commanded the neighbouring division of the IXth corps, to attack it with melinite shells from 6 to 6.30, concurrently with his own artillery. The 41st brigade was to attempt, after this preparation, to recapture the village. Moussy himself, in order to disengage the left of the XIth corps, launched the 90th

<sup>1</sup> " The commanding officer of the company of the 77th regiment which was at Aulnay-aux-Planches entered Bannes and informed Colonel Lestoquoi that the enemy was bombarding Morains-le-Petit, that machine-guns and infantry were coming along the railway line, and would arrive at Morains-le-Petit towards eight o'clock. The colonel informed General Moussy. But the 32nd, which was at Morains, had already commenced its retreat." (General Moussy's Journal of the Campaign.)

regiment in an attack on Aulnizeux and Aulnay-aux-Planches from the other side of the marshes ; a flank-attack conducted by his chief of staff, Major Jette, carried the first of these villages and completely arrested the enemy offensive.

Not for long certainly. That same night Aulnizeux was recaptured by the Germans and Major Jette was killed.<sup>1</sup> But it had cost the enemy no less than three attacks to dislodge us from the village. And over practically the whole front, before the firm attitude of our troops, and in spite of the entry of the enemy's heavy artillery established towards Clamanges, the Germans had been forced to "suspend their forward march. . . . We remained in command of the battlefield."<sup>2</sup> What is to be understood by this statement

<sup>1</sup> A splendid officer, whose loss was deeply deplored by the staff of the 17th division : after the German retreat his body was found, "his head riddled by bullets." Lieutenants de Vareilles-Sommières, Terpereau and Alloncle were killed at the same time. According to Abbé G. Voillereau the attack took place at eight o'clock in the evening. "The main body of the regiment was quartered in farms at Aulnay. . . . The Germans watched from their cleverly disguised trenches at Aulnizeux. A detachment, commanded by Lieutenant de Vareilles-Sommières, went round behind the village to surprise the Germans in the rear. The Boches let them approach quite near, and then shot them down point-blank. In the meantime Major Jette had the call to charge sounded. Some accounts affirm, on the contrary, that the Germans sounded the French call to charge, in order to deceive our men. In any case they flung themselves on the enemy trenches, and charged with the bayonet, penetrating right into the streets, etc." Abbé Voillereau thinks the attack failed in the long run. But there were several attacks, and it is certain that at seven o'clock in the evening Moussy was informed by Second-Lieutenant Bouchère of the Engineers that Aulnizeux was in our hands.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from a military chaplain in the *Éclair* of February 17, 1915.

## The 7th of September 67

is, that although we had gained little ground, we had also lost little, and nothing more was asked of us at this time. On the outskirts of Écury (which the 3rd Alexandrian regiment had entered towards midday on the 6th) as on the outskirts of Morains, the battle continued all day on the 7th without any advantage for the enemy.<sup>1</sup> And the 18th division, which had arrived the previous evening at Troyes, was put at the disposal of Eydoux; its two brigades, the 34th under General Guignabaudet and the 35th under Colonel Janin, bivouacked behind the units of the XIth corps, the first towards Connantray, the second in the direction of Normée,<sup>2</sup> and they were to deploy on the following day. In the meantime the XIth corps, augmented by the Joppé division, extricated itself successfully from the action in the Somme-Champenois, from Normée and Sommesous. The closing in of this little river of clear waters, which flowed between high-wooded slopes, had made, it is true, an excellent line of defence. The enemy beat against it without gaining any advantage. "Bullets rained from every quarter," we read in the field notebook of a German officer.<sup>3</sup> "We could not advance any further: the enemy was too strong for us. On our

<sup>1</sup> The *Archives cantonales* of Vertus.

<sup>2</sup> To be exact, the 34th brigade, by regiments drawn up in echelons, was in the woods to the north of Hill 179; the 35th, in successive regiments, in the woods astride the Fère-Champenoise road, between Hills 159 and 156. Both brigades were covered by the outposts of the XIth corps. The 36th brigade (77th and 135th) and Nacquart's battalion of the 32nd regiment of the 35th brigade, co-operated with the 17th division from August 22nd.

<sup>3</sup> Extracts from this notebook, found in the trenches on the Aisne, were published by the *Daily Telegraph* of October 19, 1914.



left the XIXth Saxon corps arrived in time to give us a short breathing space. The shell-fire was infernal. We suffered from overwhelming thirst. A glass of Pilsener would have been welcome. All of a sudden a shell fell in the wood and killed six men of my section ; a second fell right in the midst of us ; it was impossible to hold out any longer ; we retired. We tried several times to reach the village of Lenharrée, but the French artillery swept the whole wood, so that it was impossible for us to advance. And we could not discover the emplacements of the enemy's guns."

The precision of our fire had astonished this officer, who accounts for it in this strange way, that the Prussian Guards were fighting " on ground which the enemy knew as well as the palm of his hand," and which was " one of his usual fields of fire." The officer was equally astonished by the " immense reserve of munitions " which we had found to oppose the enemy.<sup>1</sup> On our extreme right, l'Espée's division continued to fill up, as best it could, the gap between the Ninth and Fourth Armies, and established contact towards Sompuis with Cary's XVIIth corps which had succeeded in gaining ground from the XIXth German corps.<sup>2</sup> The resistance von Hausen met with there and on the Somme gave him cause for reflection, and he demanded reinforcements. Von Bülow, on our left, feeling his progress arrested between Soizy-aux-Bois

<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix for the complete report of this officer.

<sup>2</sup> Gustave Babin, *op. cit.* Von Hausen's army, which attacked the forces of Foch and de Langle simultaneously, as von Bülow attacked Foch and Franchet d'Espérey, consisted of three corps : the XIIth regular, the XIIth reserve and the XIXth.

## The 7th of September 69

and Chapton, where we received the Boches on our bayonets, and further west towards the forest of Gault and Charleville—von Bülow also appealed for reserves. They arrived during the night. A massed attack on our wings was arranged for three o'clock in the morning. "The weather is fine, a little cold," notes M. Roland. "During the night incendiary fires continued at Oyes, Reuves, and even at Villevenard itself."

Tragic torches! planted around the marshes to illuminate the watching and waiting of hosts of armed men.

We were now entering on the critical phase of the battle.

## IV

## THE 8TH OF SEPTEMBER

THE manœuvre followed by von Bülow and von Hausen was fortunate for them, and conformed to the best military principles. Its only fault was that it was carried out forty-eight hours too late. The German leaders on the Western front were not really wanting in the sense of tactics so much as has been thought; but an inborn heaviness of mind, a habit of laboriously digesting every factor of a situation, combined with an exaggerated respect for method, nearly always prevented them from intervening at the right moment. On no single occasion did they show one of those flashes of inspiration which decide the fate of battles; however slightly they might lose the initiative, one has seen how it completely discountenanced them and made them incapable of improvising a new plan in revenge. In war, according to Napoleon, five minutes make all the difference between victory and defeat.

That was the case on the Marne. Joffre's great arresting stroke gives every evidence of having overthrown the enemy's calculations. Like a bird shot in full flight, this immense army which fastened on the French had lost, both on the Ourcq and on the Marne, all liberty of movement in its wings. But, to continue the metaphor, this army had still beak and claws—and cash-

## The 8th of September 71

box. Forty-eight hours earlier, von Hausen and von Bülow could easily have liberated their wings and re-established their position by a crushing blow on our centre. Was it still possible for them to do this on the 8th? They meant to attempt it in any case. At three in the morning, in pitch darkness, after sending forward their heavy artillery, the Guard and the XIIth Saxon corps (active and reserve) went forward to the east of the marshes; von Bülow's Xth active corps, reinforced by units of the Guard, advanced on the west, both simultaneously falling on the flanks of the Ninth Army.

The pressure was so formidable that we could not resist it.<sup>1</sup> The Guard had only its infantry at hand; its cavalry was performing evolutions further to the west on d'Espérey's right flank. But it was that celebrated infantry of which the 35 battalions, footguards, grenadiers, fusiliers, chasseurs, tirailleurs, would have none but picked men in their ranks, which were filled with that type of sandy-haired, blue-eyed Colossus recruited exclusively from the warlike provinces of old Prussia. The same system of selection applied to the officers, who nearly all belonged to the nobility and bore the stamp of the public school.<sup>2</sup> General Baron von Plettenberg was in command of the active corps of the Guards, while General von Gallwitz commanded the reserve corps. Forgetful of the lesson which Lanrezac had taught them at Guise, and manœuvring,

<sup>1</sup> "It was the Imperial Guard: we had to fall back hurriedly. It is difficult to get the better of these men, etc." (Letter from Second-Lieutenant M . . . in the *Courrier de Sézanne*, September 18, 1915.)

<sup>2</sup> M. le Goffic's phrase is *Écoles Supérieures*. (Translator's Note.)

moreover, under the protection of an overwhelming artillery, these picked troops flattered themselves with having quickly cleared the ground in front of them. Von Hausen's Saxons, troops nearly as brave and as stable, had no intention of being in the background; and the commencement of the action seemed to justify the expectations of both German leaders.

At seven o'clock in the morning, at the very moment when Foch issued his laconic "order of the day": "The situation is excellent: I command that the offensive shall be again vigorously prosecuted,"<sup>1</sup> we were informed that the whole of our right wing had been driven back to a depth of four kilometres: Lenharée had been carried during the night, after a furious struggle and the particularly energetic defence of a bridge-head on the Somme, whose clear waters were stained that day by the blood of those who would fight no more. The bridge-heads were held by units of the 19th regiment from Brest, the 116th from Vannes and its reserves of the 316th. They fought to the death. But our outposts before Normée were overwhelmed and scattered in all directions, leaving the 35th brigade, which had bivouacked in the woods, uncovered. At Lenharée our troops had been driven back from the railway and on the slopes behind them the village was burning. The enemy, having forced the bridge, turned furiously to the assault of the church. A final hand-to-hand struggle was waged in the cemetery, half-way up the hill on the edge of a great smooth declivity, still

<sup>1</sup> This seems to give the sense, rather than the exact words, of Foch's order.

## The 8th of September 73

cut up and strewn with debris from the German attack.<sup>1</sup> This time, in spite of the heroic defence of Captain de Saint-Bon<sup>2</sup> and units of the 225th regiment

<sup>1</sup> The German graves are more numerous than ours : they number about a hundred, and include the graves of four officers. The French graves also, both in the cemetery and near it, contain the remains of a number of officers : Major Baudisson and Captain de Saint-Bon of the 225th, Captain Deschard, Lieutenants Gay and Lescouet, Second-Lieutenant Gaudon of the 19th regiment.

<sup>2</sup> Nephew of the famous Admiral de Saint-Bon, who was for many years Minister to the Italian Navy. This Captain Henri de Saint-Bon had, before the war, acted as Aide-de-Camp to the Vice-Admiral Prefect at Cherbourg, but on the outbreak of war had asked to be sent on active service. Being left the only officer at Lenharrée, with a sergeant and two decimated companies, he was mortally wounded at four o'clock in the morning, and refused to allow his men to carry him in. "Don't come near me," he said : "don't get killed yourselves to save me." When the Germans entered the village, they found him lying on some straw in a barn, where he was attended to by one of his non-commissioned officers, Sergeant Saffre, who was wounded like himself, but who survived him. A surgical operation might have saved Saint-Bon ; the enemy did not have it performed. But afterwards, according to the Abbé Neret, when it became known to the enemy that Lenharrée had held out so long, with only two companies to defend it, the Saxon commanding-officer made his men pass in front of Captain de Saint-Bon and the other wounded French soldiers, saying, "Salute them ! They are brave men !"

Some confusion still exists as to the date of the capture of Lenharrée, which Abbé Neret definitely places on the 9th. But on that day our troops had already fallen back on Gourgauçon. The official account of Henri de Saint-Bon is nevertheless very explicit : "Having seen, on the 7th, all the officers and non-commissioned officers fall successively around him, Saint-Bon, during the whole afternoon and the following night, himself commanded the defence of the village against overwhelming enemy forces. Mortally wounded at four o'clock in the morning, he forbade his men to approach him, crying, 'Do not come near me. Don't get killed yourselves in order to save me.'"

of Cherbourg, which he commanded, we were obliged to fight a retreating battle towards Connantray, disputing every inch of the ground, profiting from the slightest unevennesses or undulations, which were numerous in that hilly district of Champagne-Pouilleuse, and, once on the plateau, utilising the cover of the pine-forest. The same recoil took place all along the line of the XIth corps, and, by a counter-stroke on the right wing of the IXth, to the south of Morains. There the attack on the rear of La Grosse and the Petite-Ferme and the disorder into which Moussy's ranks were thrown by the inhabitants fleeing before the Germans, led, towards nine o'clock—after an admirable resistance by the 90th regiment, deployed at the edge of the coverts of Champ-de-Bataille—to the sharp recoil of Moussy as far as Mont-Août.<sup>1</sup>

(De Langle de Cary.) On the other hand, the 225th belonged to the 60th reserve division, which was implicated, like the 18th, in the retreat of the XIth corps.

<sup>1</sup>“ Attack on the rear of Grosse and Petite - Ferme. Fusillade, cannonade, confusion of the 290th, 293rd, 65th . . . ; the cavalry came back in disorder among my artillery. Retreat at 7.30. Were at nine o'clock in the woods, line of Mont-Août, Puits. . . . ” (General Moussy's Journal of the Campaign.) See also the letter of Lieutenant Lalance (October 1, 1914), who has since died a glorious death : “ On September 8, the 2nd company of the 90th regiment, separated from the rest of our battalion the previous night, left Bannes towards five o'clock in the morning. Having received no orders, we marched towards the violent fusillade we heard, in the direction in which we expected to find our battalion. After crossing the wood, we gained the right of the 2nd battalion, which was deployed along the Bannes-Fère-Champenoise road, and was holding an attack launched from the direction of Morains-le-Petit. . . . We had hardly arrived at the border of the wood, when we were exposed to a violent fire directed

## The 8th of September 75

The same thing happened at Vassimont, at Hausseimont, at Sommesous, where Lieutenant-Colonel Guibert of the 60th division fell, and where the railway, the junction of the Chalons and Vitry-le-François lines, was the scene for two hours of the swaying fortunes of the battle : captured, lost, recaptured three times by our troops, who charged with the bayonet in pitch darkness. But it finally remained in our hands.<sup>1</sup>

The way lay open. The ground was cleared of the enemy on all the hills towards Fère-Champenoise. That town was built in a hollow where the defence could not be organised, except on the heights, and these were directly overlooked by the enemy. Such

against the company on the right of the 2nd battalion. A small part of the enemy force had succeeded in outflanking us, so that we were assailed both from the front and the flank. After the first few bullets had whizzed past, at the moment when I turned to warn Captain Gauroy of his danger, I saw him stagger and fall. . . . It was not till about 8.30, when, being obliged to give ground, I ordered the company to fall back, that I found his body lying on a stretcher. Always in the front rank, Captain Gauroy had known how to win the admiration and esteem of every one under his command."

<sup>1</sup> The struggle was equally fierce at the other side of the village, the junction of the Chalons and Vitry roads. It was between units of the 247th and 336th French infantry regiments and the 103rd Saxon infantry. (*The Illustration* of November 7, 1914, gave a drawing of this action, made on the spot after information from military witnesses who had taken part in it.) These same units, with some others of the 248th and the 62nd, were also engaged in the action beside the station. Major Bouchaux of the 336th was killed and buried there. The graves of Lieutenant-Colonel Guibert, Lieutenant Duncker of the 247th, and Sergeant André Renaud of the 336th are in the cemetery, with this account of Renaud's gallant deed : " He left the trench to rally his men who were falling back, brought them forward to the firing line with the greatest courage, but was himself mortally wounded."



was the confidence of the inhabitants, however, that the military chaplain whose letter we have already quoted calmly celebrated mass in the parish church of Fère, "filled with soldiers and townspeople who had been deprived of the offices of religion for several weeks."<sup>1</sup> During the celebration "loud reports were heard on the walls of the church"; the windows were blown to pieces; the alarm was given. Instantaneously the church emptied: our reserves took to their heels in the direction of the alarm. The first runners had already put the town on its guard. Fear whispered all its terrors from their lips;—that we were betrayed, that one of our covering regiments, surprised while it slept, delivered into the hands of the enemy by its officers, had been killed to the last man,<sup>2</sup> that one of the brigades of the Lefèvre division had laid down its arms, that another had turned its back, and that finally the enemy, descending on Fère by the Morains and Normée roads, was not more than 200 metres from the station.<sup>3</sup> . . . The enemy had been held up for a

<sup>1</sup> The Curé of Fère did not leave the town till Saturday, September 5.

<sup>2</sup> *La Guerre en Champagne* says with more moderation, though still with exaggeration: "In these battles of the marshes of Saint-Gond, there were equal losses on both sides, including the slaughter of Fère-Champenoise, where a French regiment, surprised while it slept, was wiped out by the enemy, their guns being left in piles behind the trenches." (Dr. Voillereau.) More than 3000 of our soldiers, one reads elsewhere, were killed outright in the Fère district alone. The cemetery of that town contains the graves of Colonel Mézière, Major Jette and many other gallant officers.

<sup>3</sup> All these accounts were exaggerated. It was here that the 32nd, the only regiment of the 35th brigade which had been surrounded, made a desperate stand in the wood, losing its commanding-officer,

## The 8th of September 77

short time, . . . not for long, for the German batteries were quartered in the midst of this "brazier." The 93rd regiment, which had already lost its brigadier, Colonel Lamey, had now also lost its commanding officer, Colonel Hétet, in a trench at the railway station. Two companies of the 347th regiment, in holding the Bannes road, had wavered and retreated ; nearly all the officers and non-commissioned officers were killed and two-thirds of the effectives disabled ; the remainder had fallen back with difficulty, leaving their wounded on the railway line half-way between Fère and Connantre.<sup>1</sup> These wounded were rescued and carried up the hill of Sainte-Sophie, under the direction of Captain François, a staff-officer, to allow of the reorganisation of the scattered brigade. Fère was evacuated about nine o'clock without having been greatly injured during the battle ; the opposing artilleries had searched for each other on either side of the town, which had itself only received stray shells.<sup>2</sup> At 10.30 in the morning,<sup>3</sup> the Colonel Mézière (whose heroic death is commemorated by a stained-glass window at Fère-Champenoise), Major Humbert, and all its officers with the exception of eleven. But the self-sacrifice of these officers saved the greater part of the men. As for the 34th brigade (114th regiment, Colonel Briant ; 125th, Colonel Deschamps), far from having played the treacherous part attributed to it, it supported the units of the 35th regiment and helped them to re-form and fall back in good order on Ouy, without leaving one wounded man in the hands of the enemy.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Second - Lieutenant Firmin M . . . from the *Courrier de Sézanne*, September 10, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> A few shells fell near the church, on the houses in the rue du Pont and the faubourg of Connantre, but the electric station sustained the only serious damage.

<sup>3</sup> "Towards one o'clock in the afternoon," according to other

Guard marched into Fère to the music of fifes, and took possession of the *Mairie* and other public buildings where guards were posted, while the main force, rallying the Saxon troops who had come down from Connantray, continued the pursuit towards Corroy and Connantre. The headquarters of the Ninth Army, established at Pleurs, fell back at the same time on Plancy.

We now held nothing in this district but isolated positions in the little pine-woods which were scattered over the fertile plain. The 60th reserve division, units of which had been cut to pieces from Normée to Sommesous, had also been swept away in the struggle. Its artillery alone still continued to fire in volleys, while retreating. It was commanded, it is true, by a specialist, Colonel Bérubé, nicknamed "Bat-la-Crête" by his men, because he was often to be seen in a breach caused by the marvellous precision of his fire. But for the rest of our units of the XIth corps and the 35th brigade, save in a few cases it was complete dislocation. All formations were intermingled. That was the reason why, towards one o'clock in the afternoon, in a little wood 1500 metres from Fère, two hundred men of the 66th and 32nd regiments found themselves suddenly surrounded. Their officers were either dead or missing. They had now only a few non-commissioned officers, among them a sergeant-major of the 66th called Guerre, in whom the audacity and reflective spirit of the true leader were to appear.

accounts, which, however, agree that small bodies of enemy troops had already penetrated into the town.

## The 8th of September 79

The enemy was moving about on the plateau, but Guerre did not hesitate a moment in attacking. For the colours of the 32nd regiment had been left there, in charge of a sergeant-major with a broken arm, a quartermaster-sergeant, a soldier and a sapper—all that was left of the colour-party,<sup>1</sup> and Guerre was determined that the colours should not fall into the hands of the enemy. The ascendancy he had gained over his small force was such that the men with one accord ceded the command to him. He divided his force into four sections and rapidly organised the defence of the wood, which was rectangular in form, sending one section to each of its borders. Memories of the Napoleonic legend inspired him.

“Regard this as the square of Waterloo,” he said to his men. “We have a flag to defend. We will defend it to the last.”

“We will, sir! We will!” they cried, infected by his own burning enthusiasm.

Assured of defeating this small force by their superior tactics, the Germans advanced in close formation as if on parade.

“Let them come,” said Guerre.

And not till the enemy was well within reach did he give the order to fire. The Germans, surprised, scattered and fell back, only to return with a battery of 77 mm. guns which they installed 500 metres from the wood. Our ranks observed this, and knew that the

<sup>1</sup> Second-Lieutenant Ménard, the colour-bearer of the 32nd, had been killed: he is buried in the cemetery of Connantray, as are many other brave officers of various regiments.

wood would soon become untenable. Guerre decided to attempt a sortie.

"I will go first with my section," he said. "If I succeed in getting through, follow me. If I fall, as is likely, try and get the colours away by the other side."

He set out, but did not get far. Contrary to his orders, his men closed round him instead of spreading out. A salvo from enemy machine-guns mowed them down. Sergeants Ferdor and Sauzeau, who were in command of the other sections, were more fortunate, and succeeded in crossing over the enemy's lines with the colours. One hundred and twenty men had set out: not more than thirty arrived. Of the colour-party only the sapper remained.<sup>1</sup> It was he who that evening had the honour of handing the glorious emblem to Colonel Janin, the commanding-officer of the 35th brigade. . . .

<sup>1</sup> He was called Malveau, and was afterwards decorated with the military medal, as was Bourgoïn, the soldier who accompanied him, and who was the son of the Chief Engineer of naval artillery. In order better to evade the enemy, the little troop had separated, and Malveau and Bourgoïn found themselves at one time alone. "Having lost their bearings," writes one correspondent, "Bourgoïn was set right by Major von Archtenstau of the Guards, who, severely and probably mortally wounded, called for help. Bourgoïn dressed his wound. In the course of conversation, the German officer caught sight of the colours and understood what had happened. 'You are a brave fellow,' he said to Bourgoïn, and showed him what direction to take. That was how Malveau and Bourgoïn were able to cross the enemy's lines at nightfall, and to collect on the way valuable information as to the position of the heavy batteries of the Germans." M. Georges Clemenceau has related this incident, with slight variants, in *L'Homme enchaîné*.



THE TOWER OF THE MARSHES AT MONDEMENT  
*From a French Army Photograph*



## The 8th of September 81

The violence of the Guards and of the XIIth Saxon division (active and reserve),<sup>1</sup> which were now attacking, did not disconcert the imperturbable Foch.

"Bah!" he said the evening before to his staff. "When the enemy makes such furious attempts to drive us back, it is because things are going badly with him elsewhere, and he is seeking compensation."

Not even the serious events of the morning caused him to change his views. "Situation excellent," he telegraphed to the general headquarters in the afternoon, using the same words he had used that morning in the order of the day to his troops. M. Babin recalls that at the *École de Guerre* Foch was fond of quoting this saying of Joseph de Maistre: "A battle lost is a battle which one has expected to lose," from which Foch deduced that it was *morally* that a battle was lost and that in taking the aphorism the other way round one might say that a battle gained was a battle which one had expected to gain—in which one would not admit oneself defeated.<sup>2</sup> Foch had not lost the battle, seeing that he believed always that he could win it, and that up till the very end of the day he had harried the enemy by his counter-offensives. Every one of our French generals contributed, by some special genius, to the victory of the Marne. The personal contribution of Foch, his greatest virtue, was his tenacity, a "calculated tenacity," as General Foy

<sup>1</sup> Babin, *op. cit.* The rest of the Saxons were engaged further south against de Langle's army: "One brigade of the XIIth Saxon corps, the 46th, to the south of Sompuis; the XIXth corps between Humbauville and Courdemanges."

<sup>2</sup> *Principes de Guerre*, chap. x. p. 269.



described it. And yet that would not have been enough without his marvellous gifts, both as a technician and as a soldier, which allowed him to vary, according to circumstances, the tactical opportunities of the units engaged, and to invent every day a new disposition for his troops. And this fertility of resource, this fine sense for manœuvring, these perpetual rebounds—these are what constitute true military genius.

At one o'clock in the afternoon, under cover of fifteen batteries emplaced to the west of Sainte-Sophie and at the foot of Mont-Août, Foch threw his 52nd reserve division from Puits on Fère-Champenoise.<sup>1</sup> At seven o'clock in the evening he again pressed the attack on the heights of the railway, which our artillery bombarded energetically. But a cordon of machine-guns barred the Bannes road : our troops could not get past them, and were falling back towards midnight on Connantre, when a mounted estafette stopped them on the railway line, telling them to return to Puits-Perdu, to be ready to resume the offensive from there on the following day.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> " A huge attack at one o'clock with the 52nd reserve division on Fère-Champenoise." (General Moussy's Journal of the Campaign.) Other accounts say the attack was commenced at 3.30. Only two regiments of the 52nd division took part in the attack, with some battalions of the 17th division, which supported them in attacking the enemy's right, to the east.

<sup>2</sup> " The Germans occupied the road as far as Fère, the station of Fère and the road leading towards Bannes. And it was on this road that we were about to launch our attack. It was impossible for us to get past the enemy. The situation was becoming critical for me, as well as for my superior officers, when I remembered that the railway, at the entry of the line into Fère, was strongly underbuilt. I at once made for that spot, where I installed my

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It is thus that a true leader knows how to keep his men in good fighting trim. Another counter-offensive executed that same evening in the neighbourhood of Connantray, by Eydoux and those units of the XIth corps which he had been able to collect, was more fortunate, and succeeded in reoccupying the heights to the north of Œuvy. Already towards Hill 128, at the moment when the Saxon troops had crossed the Maurienne, the 114th regiment had opposed their further progress. The 60th reserve division deployed towards Semoine ; the 9th cavalry division, which had contributed (with two dragoon brigades under Séréville and Sailly) to the arrest of the recoil following the surprise of Fère-Champenoise,<sup>1</sup> supported this

company. I had not been there three minutes, when our artillery commenced the bombardment of the station. I was only about 100 metres from it. I fell back slightly to escape the short shots, and at midnight, in silence, under the guidance of my major, who had rejoined us, we were on the way to Connantre, when a mounted estafette stopped us on the line to give us an order to report at Puits-Perdu and to recommence the attack the next day. But the Germans left us no choice ; it was they who attacked us and that furiously, at break of day." (Letter from Second-Lieutenant Firmin M . . ., *Courrier de Sézanne*, September 10, 1915.)

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from a private letter. It may be said in passing, that it is impossible to render too great homage to this splendid 9th division, commanded by General de l'Espée. Its activity sufficed to impress the enemy for the whole duration of the battle, and in resisting all the Saxon flank-guard attacks, which did not cease for a single day, and were especially violent at Sommesous, Vatry and Mailly, the 9th division covered the right of the Ninth Army to the end of the battle. Regarding the events of September 8, the two brigades of dragoons and the artillery of the corps had passed the night at Mailly. General de l'Espée, with the brigade of cuirassiers, bivouacked at Villers-Herbisse. The dragoons set out at three o'clock in the morning. A

movement with its brigade of cuirassiers under Colonel de Cugnac. And finally, on our left, Mondement, the impregnable Mondement, continued to resist.

The throwing back of the XIth corps by overwhelming enemy forces did not tend to make the position of the IXth corps less precarious ; it held the western promontory and the southern border of the marshes, and the unity of the enemy's effort could not fail to show itself by a vigorous attempt to drive the IXth corps from these positions.

There again—a proof that von Bülow and von Hausen were acting together—the attack was launched at dead of night, towards three o'clock. The unfortunate natives, who had gone to sleep full of confidence, were awakened by a storm of explosions which left no doubt as to the intentions of the enemy. It was the usual artillery preparation which preceded great waves of assault. Von Hausen, who commanded the Xth German corps, was reinforced during the night with sections of the Guard, and tried, by way of

battalion of the 248th, surprised at Sommesous, fell back towards the south. General Sérévillle arrived and extricated them after a sharp engagement. He was fortunate enough to be able to bombard, in the rear, with his artillery, the position the enemy meant to occupy south of Montépreux. Towards nine o'clock General de l'Espée ordered that the division should be joined up between Mailly and Semoine, whence it beat a retreat before advancing enemy forces, to the plateau of the Arbre-de-Justice. It was there that l'Espée received the order, at two o'clock in the afternoon, to rest the attack of the XVIIth corps on Sompuis ; but judging that he was too late to operate with his whole force, he contented himself with detaching Sérévillle's brigade and one battery, whose intervention at the end of the battle had a great moral effect.

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Oyes and Montgivroux, to infiltrate his forces around the castle. "At three o'clock in the morning," says the Curé of Reuves, "our machine-guns came into action." Their fire drove the enemy back into the wood. Humbert and Grossetti, whose action was closely connected, combined in a simultaneous renewal of their converging movement on Saint-Prix. Boichut to the left from Chapton, and Barthal to the right from the Haut-des-Grès, carried out a systematic artillery preparation on Talus, Loisy, le Botrait, the crest of the Signal du Poirier, and Oyes,<sup>1</sup> to make it possible for our troops to approach these positions at dawn. But the enemy was constantly receiving reinforcements. The massing of his troops was signalled from Villevenard: columns of all arms were marching towards Saint-Prix, and behind the enemy's first line of batteries, between Congy and Baye, a new artillery was unmasking itself: it resumed the bombardment of the castle, suspended for a short time to allow of the advance of enemy troops. . . . Mondement—the flames dancing through its broken windows—saw the

<sup>1</sup> "From 3.30 to 5, the 4th and 6th batteries (of the 2nd brigade of the 49th artillery) bombarded the village of Oyes. Then Colonel Fellert's tirailleurs advanced to the attack. . . . At 8.30, the counter-battery fired on the supposed enemy position to the north of Villevenard. The enemy replied immediately by a violent volley of 150 mm. shells, which neutralised the group. Lieutenant Cheronnet was killed at his post. I was in telephonic communication with him at the time from headquarters. I went at once to the battery: he was sitting behind the waggon, without any apparent injury, just as he had been hit. Beside him, a non-commissioned officer, who had also been killed, was still holding the receiver to his ear." (Journal of Lieutenant Alouis.)

glories of its ancient splendour fall around it : every moment a new breach was opened in its walls ; all that remained of the high red-tiled roof was shattered ; the magnificent limousine was reduced to fragments ; a horse, the last in the stables, the last hope of escape, was crushed below the debris.

The unfortunate inmates were crowded together in a cellar ; the tower which rose above it tottered and fell, its ruins partially blocking up the only entrance to their refuge ; a little more and those within would have been buried alive. Terrified by this last disaster they left their cellar, which seemed now more unsafe than the open. They ran to take shelter on the plateau, under a great elm tree : a shell burst right above them, others ploughed into the earth all around. " It was impossible to remain outside," wrote Abbé Robin. " We went back to the castle : a bomb pierced the façade just beside us ; to crown our misfortunes, we had no more food. We made up our minds to leave the castle. But M. Eugene Jacob refused to go with us. ' You must go,' he said. ' Leave me here.' We refused. He should be carried if necessary. At last it was settled. We set out. We only got about fifty metres from the castle. At this rate, under constant and terrible fire, our little party would never have arrived at its destination had it not met a patrol on its way to Sézanne : these brave men agreed, in passing through Broyes, to carry an urgent request from the fugitives to General Humbert.<sup>1</sup> The general at once sent off one of his

<sup>1</sup> Asker, *op. cit.*, says that it was a peasant who carried a message from the fugitives to General Humbert during the night. We have

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officers in a motor car. Over broken roads, full of shell-holes, in dead of night and under heavy fire, it was a miracle that these poor people arrived without further mishap at Broyes, where the crowd was so great that they had to spend the night on chairs. The next day a carriage took them to Sézanne, where they joined the train for Montereau. But the strain had been too much for M. Eugene Jacob, suffering as he was from advanced heart disease. He died while stepping into the train. . . ."

In order to counteract the dangers which threatened Mondement, Dubois had, the previous evening, detached the 77th infantry regiment from Moussy's corps, and had sent it to support the tirailleurs and zouaves who were attacking Saint-Prix with the 42nd division. The 77th had bivouacked in the castle of Mondement, and in the morning had deployed towards the Signal; one of the reconnoitring parties, pushed audaciously forward by Captain Henrion as far as Soizy-aux-Bois, made two prisoners—the first, it was said, of the day.<sup>1</sup> That was the only part played by the 77th in the attack, which was a brilliant affair, and which threw disorder into the ranks of the enemy, surprised by those he counted on surprising. At 6.30 in the morning, master of the stream and of the little wood to the south-west of Oyes, Colonel Eon,<sup>2</sup> who preferred to follow the account of the Curé of Reuves, which we received through Abbé Millard.

<sup>1</sup> These movements are well described in the account by the soldier Elie C . . . , who was with the 77th at Mondement. See Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> Now General Eon,

commanded the attack on the right, flung the tirailleurs and the zouaves to the assault of the Poirier ; the hill was captured, and this fine feat of arms was completed by the conquest of Oyes and its heights. At the same time Colonel Trouchaud, in command of the 84th brigade, who directed the attack on the left of the 42nd division, hurled the 162nd on Soizy-aux-Bois, which he carried in a bayonet charge, and where a company of the 77th put him in touch with the troops on the right. The 8th chasseurs occupied the Botrait wood ; the 16th, the wood of Grandes-Garennés, which was thoroughly searched by a battalion of the 151st, that had come to make les Culots its headquarters. Could we have gained a greater success from that time ? Were Cros and Fellert afraid of being outflanked or of hurling themselves against superior enemy forces towards Voizy and Usages ? The one on the Poirier, the other resting on Reuves and Oyes—both thought it necessary to establish themselves provisionally in the defence of their new positions. And the subsequent course of events showed that their precautions were not unnecessary. Two brigades of artillery were sent to the rear of our trenches on the Signal du Poirier : they were of service to the 42nd division, which with magnificent spirit continued its march on Saint-Prix and the Petit-Morin alone.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It does not appear, however, that its units went further than Hill 140 (the chapel and bridge of Saint-Prix). Rain was falling heavily and made fighting in the wood very difficult. All accounts of this affair leave a confused impression : one account holds that it appeared as if the German resistance was weakening, that the enemy was preparing to retreat ; another insists that the enemy was considering a

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Part of Blondlat's brigade remained on the line Broussy-le-Petit — Mesnil-Broussy; the 77th preserved the liaison between the Signal du Poirier and Soizy. It kept that liaison till late in the afternoon, till three o'clock, to be exact. At that moment<sup>1</sup> an order from Dubois recalled it urgently to reinforce his right, compromised by the wavering of the neighbouring corps: the regiment was to proceed immediately towards Saint-Loup. It set off. In the midst of a battle such an important gap in our lines could not escape the enemy's notice,<sup>2</sup> and he judged the moment favourable to attempt a new attack on Mondement, by way of Oyes and Broussy-le-Petit.

From the evening before, in concealing his movements by shallow trenches, in making use of the natural pathways whose borders of trees and rushes offered new direction of attack. Whichever it may have been, it is certain that the enemy laboured feverishly at the organisation of the defence of Talus-Saint-Prix; that the Ménétrier brigade, established at midday near la Villeneuve, opposed the enemy with all its might. The Aubertin brigade supported the advance of the 151st towards les Culots; the Alvin brigade was on guard from eleven o'clock towards the Signal du Poirier; the two brigades of Colonel Coffec supported the Morocco division. At nightfall all this artillery, except one brigade, was in position to the south of Soizy, bivouacking, as if quite at home, near Chaption, where the farm continued to serve as headquarters for the staff of the 42nd division.

<sup>1</sup> Dubois' order reached the staff at 2.30, but it did not arrive at our front lines till between three and four o'clock.

<sup>2</sup> The more that some difficulty and confusion resulted among our troops. "Units of the 77th fell back little by little, the Morocco division thought a general order to retire had been received: it commenced to fall back in its turn." (E. C.) But Colonel Cros, by the energy and bravery of his personal action, rallied his men and led them forward again.



some cover, the enemy had won his way forward in the marshes towards the two villages. Even by the road which led from Villevenard to Oyes along the banks of the Bonon, a small affluent of the Petit-Morin, he crept about three o'clock in the afternoon towards the barricade thrown across the road near the priory of Saint-Gond. Our positions had previously been heavily bombarded: the marshes were nothing "but a cloud of smoke";<sup>1</sup> shells had rained all that morning on "Oyes, Reuves, and Mondement."<sup>2</sup> Shortly before three o'clock they began to fall on Saint-Gond.

Rising out of the moat, which was just visible under a profusion of water-plants, the disused priory of Saint-Gond, situated in the midst of the marshes, formed a kind of island seven arpents in extent. (The "arpent" is an ancient Celtic measure of land which has remained in use in France.) Of the original abbey, burnt by the Huguenots, rebuilt in the sixteenth century and converted into a priory, practically nothing remains. Of the priory itself only a few relics still exist; the bell of the great gate, the arch of a beautiful Renaissance window built into the wall among common rubble, a fragment of the glazed brick pavement of Chantemerle, and two or three of the old trees which shade—in the midst of these ruins—the rustic roof of the last hermit

<sup>1</sup> From M. Roland's Journal. The mother-superior of the convent at Andecy wrote: "The sky is obscured by powder and smoke, which fills the very air we breathe."

<sup>2</sup> "On Monday we fought more to the right. Then, on Tuesday morning, we returned to Villevenard about seven o'clock. . . . At three o'clock in the afternoon the order arrived to advance." (Letter from a German deserter to Abbé Millard, June 13, 1915.)

## The 8th of September 91

of Saint-Gond, Abbé Millard, Correspondent to the *Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France*, and member of the *Société Française d'Archéologie*. The learned ecclesiastic lived there, far from the world, with no company save that of his books and the clamorous croaking of the frogs. The frogs seem amply to have revenged themselves for the time long ago when St. Gond, whose spiritual raptures they disturbed, obtained a promise from Our Lord that He would only allow them to raise their voices in rotation. It was asserted even in the eighteenth century that only one frog could be heard croaking in the marshes at a time.<sup>1</sup> But when the priory was forsaken, the interdict no doubt ceased, and Abbé Millard is too full of gentleness and kindness to demand its re-enforcement. Divided between his studies and his rural pursuits—for the one of which he dons a scarlet fez, brought back from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, for the other a hat woven out of rushes, which gives him the appearance of one of the haymakers of the neighbourhood—Abbé Millard was engaged shortly before the war on a new edition of the *Life of St. Gond*, to which he had meant to consecrate the last efforts of his pen. But his labours were interrupted by illness. He was confined to bed when the imminent arrival of the Germans was announced. "Then I shall see Attila again," he said. But his housekeeper had no such intention. She was a masterful woman, who, except for a few private matters, managed her master's affairs with a high hand.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires Historiques de la Province de Champagne*, by M. Baugier, Seigneur de Breuvery, 1721. See Appendix.

"What have you to save here, M. le Curé?" she asked him. "As regards parishioners, you have none, except the frogs. They can very well defend themselves alone against your Attila. We must go, and at once." And she lifted her master into a wheelbarrow, and so conveyed him to Oyes.<sup>1</sup>

It was none too soon : our tirailleurs had arrived. That particular spot, an elbow of the road with the ruins of the old buildings, seemed suitable for an ambushade. An officer shouted an order : with stones, trunks of trees, bundles of sticks, furniture, upturned carts, all manner of things taken from the old priory and the neighbouring farm of la Lune, the soldiers constructed an imposing barricade. Some barbed wire and a continuous trench, as practised by the Germans, would have been better. But we remained faithful to our old mistakes ; our men fought nearly everywhere in the open or behind stacks or trunks of trees. So that, with its two little "niches"<sup>2</sup> for machine-guns at each end, the barricade served its purpose well enough, and the men made good use of it, according to the testimony of a deserter from the enemy force which had been ordered to carry the position. This deserter, at the first opportunity, took

<sup>1</sup> I have since received a caustic letter from Abbé Millard : "I was not taken to Oyes in a wheelbarrow," he writes. "I walked there myself, my stick in my hand, and the servant took the books and other things I required, in the wheelbarrow. It was my first outing after eighteen months' illness. Please suppress the illusion about the wheelbarrow. Do not weave legends : it is difficult to destroy them." I received this letter on September 17, 1916 : hence this note.

<sup>2</sup> This expression was used by Abbé Millard.

refuge in a cellar of the priory. In spite of volleys from the 75 mm. guns which swept Chenaille, les Usages, Voizy and the hills of Saint-Prix, the Germans "descended and scattered their troops among the slopes of the vineyards." M. Roland, from the depths of his vault, followed all their movements with his field-glasses: "German infantry were swarming behind the houses of the village. . . . Guns were placed against the walls and in the gardens." Soon afterwards "the troops were seen advancing along the course of the Bonon, across the marshes." The fierce summer heat had dried up the deep bed of the stream, which offered good shelter for the enemy. "We crawled along like snakes," wrote the deserter we have already quoted, to Abbé Millard. "Finally we arrived at the abbey in front of your house, where an ambuscade had been erected. Your Senegalese troops at once fired on us; we fell over like flies. Our officers shouted: 'Fix bayonets!' and we rushed forward. . . . As for me, I took refuge in the nearest cellar behind the house." He stayed there till eight o'clock in the evening.<sup>1</sup> During that time, the barricade had given

<sup>1</sup> This deserter is the same as the one mentioned by M. Roland. The reader may perhaps be curious to hear the end of his Odyssey. "A German soldier, his cap on his head, his coat over his arm, without weapons, came towards me on the cross-roads, brought forward by M. Leon Langlais. The soldier addressed me, and asked me, in good French, to take him to a commanding-officer. He had been hiding in a cellar of the Priory of Saint-Gond, and wished to give himself up; his company, many of whom lived in the neighbourhood of . . ., had had enough fighting. His village, of which I have forgotten the name, is . . . kilometres from the frontier. . . . He had taken advantage of the retreat of his regiment. . . . He had got a

way ; further to the east, the enemy—who had pushed his machine-guns half-way along the Joches high road under cover of the fir trees of la Verrerie—drove us back from Broussy-le-Petit and then from Mesnil-Broussy. Reuves, in its turn, fell about five o'clock, Oyes at six, in spite of the splendid resistance of the zouaves under Captain Cuttoli.<sup>1</sup> But these were the final efforts of a resistance now at its last gasp. All our gains of the morning had been lost : the Blondlat brigade on the right had fallen back on Allemant ; the tirailleurs of Cros and Fellert on the left had been driven violently towards Montgivroux.<sup>2</sup>

bullet in one of the fingers of his right hand two days before, and required to have the wound dressed. As we talked, we met a major of the Engineers, who was on horseback inspecting the plain. Two other officers rode by his side. The prisoner talked to him and answered the questions the major asked him. Tears came into his eyes, but he was reassured when the major said to him : ' Don't be afraid of anything, my friend, no harm will come to you ; your wound will be dressed and you will be given a brassard of the Red Cross to wear.' "

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix. " Day and night," says one account, " fighting went on in these villages. Rifle-shots, bayonet charges, cries, groans, intermingled with the rumbling and bursting of shells." In the course of the forward and backward movements which hurled the adversaries at each other, the villages were taken and retaken (according to the same witness) three or four times. At Oyes, where Captain Eugène Parès of the Algerian tirailleurs was killed on September 6, we lost also Lieutenant de Varennes, who was hit by a bullet in the forehead while making a reconnaissance."

<sup>2</sup> " Seven o'clock. The infantry has fallen back. There is nothing now between us (artillery) and the enemy. The brigade (and and 49th) is retreating along the road from Mondement to Allemant, where it will spend the night, covered by all that remains of one or two companies of tirailleurs. . . . It has been a decisive day as far as

During the night the enemy pushed forward to within 1500 metres of the village and entrenched in the stubble fields, where he awaited the break of day to resume his victorious advance.

The situation seemed hopeless. But Humbert, who had now no reserves except Tisseyre's battalion of zouaves, ordered the French to hold on, to take advantage of every hollow, every undulation in the ground : he did not allow his artillery, caught as it was under heavy fire, to seek new positions in the rear. Dubois, his chief of staff, who now on the right, now on the left, followed the oscillations of the battle, and who, during these days, had found the means to come to the aid of the neighbouring corps, while defending foot by foot the enormous front entrusted to him—Dubois was no less intractable ; he excused no giving way, and he wrote to one of his divisional commanders who was outflanked, that his retreat was inadmissible, that he must deal summarily with deserters, and that failure to carry out orders received was a grave indict-

the superiority of the German artillery is concerned. We are bringing up the rear of our troops." (Lieutenant Alouis' Journal of the Campaign.)

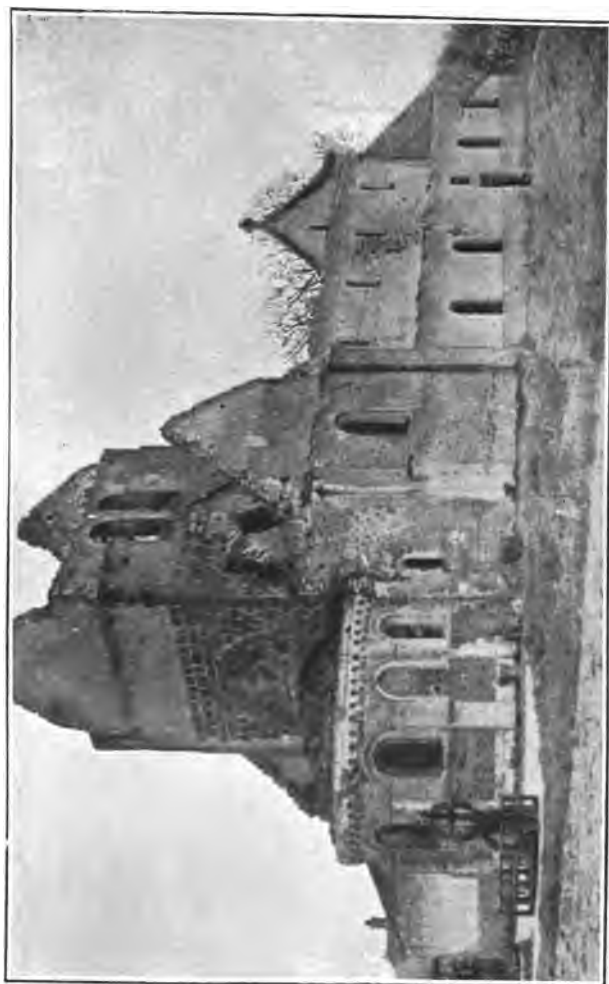
We may add here that at 1.30 in the morning, the brigade formed up in position along and to the east of the Broyes road, and that the 6th battery (Naud) went forward at dawn along the Montgivroux road, towards the Castle of Mondement. This battery, and the 4th, were intended by Humbert to act as a flank guard for the castle and the village, and he had given orders that they should be established there the evening before. The order, by some error of transmission, not having been carried out, Humbert sent Colonel Barthal at dawn to proceed with the operation. But it was too late ; the guns were hardly installed when they had to fall back.

ment against the officer who received them. On the new line, Montgivroux — Allemant — Mont-Août — Puits, while awaiting the arrival of the 77th regiment, which had set out for Saint-Loup in torrents of rain at five o'clock in the evening, Dubois sought to fortify his right flank, uncovered by the retreat of the XIth corps. Eydoux, from behind Gourgauçon, re-formed his scattered effectives, and out of these disconnected units in a few hours he created an army. Although we had given way to some extent in our centre, Franchet d'Espérey on our left advanced practically along the whole line. Maud'huy with the XVIIIth corps had forced the Petit-Morin and taken possession of Marchais-en-Brie. Hache with the IIIrd corps cleared the road to Montmirail, which he entered at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and thus constituted a menace to the flank of the enemy corps, which continued to mark time in the Charleville-Corfélix region. This menace was further aggravated at the close of the day by the gains of the Xth corps towards Boissy-le-Repos.

Flux and reflux, that constituted the history of the battle, and in spite of appearances there was yet no cause for despair. Certain signs revealed confusion in the enemy's ranks at least as great as in ours. "One phrase of an Order for the Day, found on a wounded German officer, tends to show," says M. Babin, "that the enemy staff had not great confidence in the possibility of his advancing: it prescribed that the regimental trains should have their engines turned round, facing north."







THE CHURCH OF SOMMESOUS  
*From a French Army Photograph*

## The 8th of September 97

Was it already the "effect of suction," the "cupping-glass" of which so much has been said, produced by the sharp attack of Manoury on the flank of von Klück's army?—von Klück who, in order to parry an enveloping movement, hastened to close up his line, imprudently extended? Whatever the cause may have been, from September 8 the German high command hesitated: all evidence goes to prove that it did not know whether to follow up or to arrest the offensive.<sup>1</sup> The enemy spent nearly the whole of one day in equivocation, and in the course of that day, the 9th, he made one supreme effort—which was after all perhaps nothing but a hastily conceived manœuvre to deceive us as to his real intentions.

<sup>1</sup> What is to be thought of the confidences of a German officer "of mark" to a Spanish journal, *Euzkadi*, from which the *Renaissance* published an extract in its issue of October 14, 1916? The battle of the Marne was then in its fifth day.

"It seems," he wrote, "that Manoury must have exhausted himself in these formidable attacks. But Von Klück had grown weaker also. It was at this juncture that the general who had taken the offensive (Von Klück) called urgently for the IVth reserve army corps, which had remained at Compiègne. He called for it that he, in his turn, might envelop the troops of Manoury, that he might fall on Paris from the north. But Moltke was informed of this, and as he perceived that Von Bülow on his left wing was being vigorously attacked by General Foch, he commanded that the reserves from Compiègne should reinforce the ranks of Von Bülow and not those of Von Klück. The IVth corps was to effect an encircling movement. But it lost a great deal of time; and at the last moment, because its commanding officer acquired the conviction that the great danger approached by the Ourcq, the order was given that the reserve which was advancing to the aid of Von Bülow should return towards the wing which was almost surrounded. But it was already too late."

## V

## THE 9TH OF SEPTEMBER

DAY broke on a sky still reddened by the angry glow of burning villages. All night long, beneath the moon, the "savage dogs of Pomerania" had howled round their bivouacs in the marshes.

Heavy showers had fallen the previous night, but the moon had cleared away the storm, and though the sky was clouded in the morning, no rain fell till nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, shortly before the German retreat was sounded. But these showers could not be described as that "torrential downpour" which, according to some historians, "quickly filled the marshes, dried up by the intense heat of summer."

There is no doubt that the Marshes of Saint-Gond are no longer so imposing as they used to be; the great lake of quaternary times, the immense emerald set in the silver circle of the low-lying hills of Champagne, has disappeared. But the hidden treasures of the marshes bear witness to the former existence of lake cities, the remains of which one can still discern below the surface. Such as they are, and however dried up they may become, there is no drought capable of drying up that part of the marshes which has not been reclaimed by cultivation. Under the dense growth of reeds, which in September attain to a height of over seven feet, they present at every season of the year the most

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deceptive, the most pitiless of snares. And this is the part of the marshes which forms a border to the high-roads for the greater part of their length.

Since the evening before the dust and smoke of battle had covered them with a thick veil.<sup>1</sup> But these daily smoke-curtains, fatal perhaps to other troops, served the plans of the enemy, who had not yet shaken off the oppression of the Hercynian Forest, and who seemed to have formed an alliance with all the obscuring forces of the atmosphere. While, at break of day, Blondlat attempted to put his brigade in touch with Fellert's troops, an entire German brigade, which had taken up its position unknown to us below Oyes,<sup>2</sup> made a sortie from its lines, threw the infantry of Jacquot and Toulet into confusion, and flung itself with a sudden rush on Mondement. It was impossible to hold out against such forces. The 6th battery of the 49th brigade, which had just got into position on the esplanade, had only time to yoke up its horses : during the moving of this brigade, Colonel Barthal was killed by a shell.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The smoke became so dense that at times it completely blocked our view and prevented us from observing the movements of the enemy." (Henri Libermann, *op. cit.*)

<sup>2</sup> Asker, *op. cit.* : "But here something very serious happened. An entire German brigade debouched from Reuves towards Mondement. . . ." See Appendix : *The 77th at Mondement* : "A brigade debouched from Oyes early on the morning of the 9th, seized the castle, etc."

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant Alouis' Journal also reports this incident : "Our guns of the 6th battery were hardly in position when the bullets began to whistle : at the same time bursts of shell-fire exploded near us. The enemy was attacking Mondement : his storming party appeared

Mondement, left to itself, fell after a mere show of resistance. Finding himself at once master of the castle, which assured him ultimately the key of the marshes, the enemy organised his forces in a masterly way; blocked up all openings with mattresses, placed machine guns on every floor, even in the granaries. At the same time his light batteries hurried forward by the Saint-Gond and Reuves roads, now clear for his troops. And in the beautiful *salons*, ornamented with charming Louis XV. panels, his staff was installed, a staff said to include an august personage believed to be Prince Eitel.

But Prince Eitel was said to have been seen in many different places during the Battle of the Marne; at Baye, at Coulommiers, at the castle of Mareuil-sur-Ay, at Chauffry and so on.<sup>1</sup> This ubiquity of the modern with a rush, barely 500 metres away. It took our outposts—*tirailleurs* wearied with ceaseless watching—by surprise; they scattered and took refuge in the castle and in the village to the north. Gun-limbers were hurried up. In spite of losses among teams and crew caused by the enemy's fire, I was able to get all the guns away, and left the position accompanying the last waggon, drawn by a sergeant and a trumpeter! We rejoined the rest of the brigade, which still occupied its former positions. I learned at that moment, about eight o'clock, that the colonel had been hit. I went to him at once. He had been looking for new positions on the Broyes-Mondement road, on horseback, when a shell burst under his horse and broke his thigh. He was lying stretched out in a ditch, black with powder. Major Chaigne, Captain de Bony de Lavergne and the surgeon, A. M. Isay, were with him. He was quite conscious, and did not seem to be in pain. An ambulance was hastily summoned: we laid him in it. Another shell burst quite near, without, however, harming any one. . . . The colonel was taken to Broyes."

<sup>1</sup> But M. Roland told me that Abbé Favret had seen the cover of a little cardboard box, found on the border of the marshes, addressed to

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Attila seems to throw some doubt on his presence at Mondement. And Humbert had other cares at that time than researches into identification. He wished to recapture the castle: he could not resign himself to leaving it in the hands of the enemy—who might perhaps have abandoned it of his own accord some hours later. But with what forces was Humbert to recapture it? He had thrown his last reserves into the firing-line. While hoping that Dubois would be able to come to his assistance, he asked the 42nd division to lend him its *chasseurs-à-pied*, and he flung them, with the remains of his own troops, on the castle. This

Prince Eitel. "I was told by Captain Bérard, who was told by the Abbé himself," said M. Roland (see Appendix). It seems proved at all events that a staff was installed at Mondement (though it might have been only a battalion staff, as it has been ascertained from German prisoners that it was a battalion and its staff which occupied the castle), and that during the few hours which elapsed between the fall of the castle and its recapture by our troops, this staff accounted for very many bottles of wine. A journalist who visited Mondement some weeks after the battle of the Marne, M. Magne of the *Petit Parisien*, estimated the number of empty champagne bottles lying strewn on the floor of the entrance hall alone at 300. "Three hundred?" said Felix, the guardian of the castle, who had counted them: "say rather 800"—a proof that even journalists occasionally understate the truth.

According to another inhabitant of the Marne, M. Quinet of Sézanne, whose motor was requisitioned that evening for the transport of wounded, "there were mattresses covered with blood in every room in the castle and on every table were glasses full of champagne. One walked everywhere over the debris of broken bottles." At Fère and in all the Champenoise district, postcards of the Kiosk of Mondement Castle were sold, bearing this legend: "Kiosk of Mondement Castle, where the Crown Prince and the German staff were drinking champagne when the first French shell broke in on them. After the flight of the Germans their glasses were found, still half full."

counter-attack failed. Very well ! it must be tried again !

But that was just the time when Foch—his right wing dislocated and obliged to fall back on Corroy, Gourgauçon, Semoine and from there as far as Salon—determined after consultation with Franchet d'Espérey to attempt the most audacious of manœuvres. Checked at Mondement, his centre wavering and about to lose its strong position on Mont-Août, having no forces he could use except the extremity of his left wing, he decided to make this small body turn as on a pivot, or to use less figurative language, to take the 42nd division from his left and throw it to his right on the flank of von Hausen. This fine manœuvre has been compared with that of the Prince of Saxe at Saint-Privat ; it has been regarded as the decisive action which determined the fate of the battle ;<sup>1</sup> it might perhaps be more exact

<sup>1</sup> Foch's instructions bore simply that " the 42nd infantry division, as soon as relieved by the Xth army corps, will proceed to form itself by Broyes and Saint-Loup into the reserve army of Linthes and Pleurs." That could not have been anything but a measure of protection against German attack. But Foch added : " The point of to-morrow's manœuvre is to debouch by Fère-Champenoise. For this reason, report on all available forces and all activity in this district." And he fixed the operation to begin at 10.15 the next morning, in slightly modifying his directions : " The 42nd division will arrive on the front Linthes-Pleurs. Whatever the situation of the XIth army corps, whether it be far to the rear or not, we count on resuming the offensive with the 42nd infantry division on Connantre and Corroy, an offensive in which the IXth army corps will take part on the right, Morains-Fère-Champenoise." No doubt was left after these two orders ; the flanking manœuvre was clearly indicated. We may, therefore, hold it as proved, while recognising as we have done above, that when it commenced the German retreat had already begun.

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to say that it precipitated that fate, which, from six o'clock in the evening, could no longer be doubted. It also freed the left of the Fourth Army which von Hausen, strongly entrenched to the south of Vitry, could not reconcile himself to abandon.<sup>1</sup> But at the time when Foch conceived his manœuvre,<sup>2</sup> his air-service had not yet been able to inform him (as has been asserted) as to the "existence of a gap" between the two German armies.<sup>3</sup> The manœuvre was the more audacious on that account. Its only drawback was that it left Mondement uncovered for several hours—Mondement, where the remains of the Morocco companies, nearly all their officers out of action, wandered at random in the woods.

But the movement of the 42nd division had begun at dawn; the castle had not yet fallen, and it was thought that the Montgivroux—Allemant front was

<sup>1</sup> The struggle at this point (Glannes-Flignicourt-Marolles) lasted till September 8. De Langle did not enter Vitry till the 12th; but from four o'clock on the morning of the 11th, the evacuation of the town had commenced.

<sup>2</sup> September 8, at ten o'clock in the evening.

<sup>3</sup> "Thanks to the aviators, the high command had been aware of the existence of a gap between the armies of Von Bülow and Von Hausen, and it was that knowledge which allowed General Foch to push forward his wedge. This gap was the result of Von Bülow's retreating movement." (Interview of Colonel Carlos Fernandez, Military Attaché of Chili, with Fournier's agency, reproduced by M. Fabreguettes.) Foch was *not*, however, aware of this gap till the afternoon of the 9th, but he profited by it at once, having the 42nd division at his disposal, because the intuition of this great leader, his presentiment of the imminent retreat of the enemy, had led him to summon the 42nd by an order sent during the night. M. Joseph Reinach recalls clearly that Foch had stated the principle of this manœuvre in his lectures at the *École de Guerre*.



sufficiently organised to resist the pressure of the enemy till the arrival of the 151st reserve division of the Xth corps. Events having belied these conjectures, Humbert had turned back towards Dubois as towards his natural protector. The 77th regiment hurried forward. And if we credit the account of Staff-Officer Asker, the falling back of the 42nd division had been for us "the best of windfalls," for, whilst the infantry of the division executed this "castling" movement, its artillery was not required for two hours, and was able, while passing through Broyes, to concentrate its fire, for these two hours, on Mondement.

Formed up in a semicircle to the north of the village, the six batteries of the division, augmented by three batteries of the Morocco division now again in action, opened an "infernal" fire of extraordinary precision on the park, the woods and the slopes of Mondement. The artillery was commanded, it is true, by Colonel Boichut,<sup>1</sup> who has been called the "virtuoso of the 75's, the Lord of Thunder." According to all accounts, it was "one of the most impressive artillery actions" ever seen. Not only did the barrage it laid down before Mondement prevent the enemy from advancing, but it also gave the 77th regiment time to arrive at its new positions, where without a moment's

<sup>1</sup> One of our most brilliant generals to-day. This concentric fire was an idea of Humbert's, at whose disposal Foch had put the artillery of the 42nd division, while the infantry of the division was defiling behind the Morocco division. In agreement with Groesetti, Humbert used it between Broyes and the woods, with the objective of preparing a general counter-attack on the castle and front of Mondement.

## The 9th of September 105

halt, without even a mouthful of food, it took up its position and deployed towards the castle.<sup>1</sup>

The order to proceed towards Mondement had surprised the 77th regiment near Saint-Loup, between Linthes and Péas, at eight o'clock in the morning. It was no longer raining; the sun had risen, and with it hope had sprung up in the hearts of the men. The company captains had succeeded in procuring some mutton. It was just about to be cut up: great cauldrons of coffee were singing by the fire. . . . Shoulder packs! March!—and that without having eaten the stew, without having tasted the coffee! The greatness of the sacrifice may be measured, when it is remembered that for three days, almost since the beginning of the

<sup>1</sup> Another effect of the artillery fire seems to have been the immediate evacuation of the castle by its staff. The general opinion in the district, supported by various accounts published at the time and afterwards, is that two German generals were killed in the course of the bombardment, and Prince Eitel wounded. I have not been able to ascertain on what evidence these reports are based. It is certain that no body of a German general was found at Mondement after the recapture of the castle, but it is true that the Germans, when they found it impossible to burn their dead in the course of the battle, carried them away, tied in bundles of four, in motor-lorries or even in common carts, towards the crematoriums of Belgium. During the whole night of the 9th, according to M. Roland, "a long procession of these lorries descended slowly towards the marshes, looking perhaps for the wounded." They passed back again at the same pace, and M. Roland, a native of Lorraine, recognised them by the peculiar sound of their wheels as waggons from Lorraine. But a motor having "two powerful head-lights" which, coming from Mondement, tore up the road towards Congy at full speed, particularly arrested his attention. He believed it contained some "great personage"—perhaps Prince Eitel, who was said to have been wounded, and who would therefore have been left in the rear till nightfall.

battle, these men had eaten nothing but raw beetroot. Such was the moral of this regiment, that not one protesting voice was raised.

"The situation is grave, very grave," said the chiefs, "but it is in no wise hopeless. Hold on till midday, till the arrival of the 42nd division at Pleurs, and the battle is won."

Colonel (now General) Lestoquoi, commander of the 77th regiment, had orders to send one of his battalions immediately to Allemant, where it was to be at the disposal of Colonel Eon, commander of the 36th brigade. Colonel Lestoquoi and the rest of his force were to make for Broys with all possible speed. The companies set out across the fields to save time. At ten o'clock, Colonel Lestoquoi, who had gone on in front, was able to reassure Humbert, to guarantee that his men of the 77th would be at the *rendez-vous* by 10.30. As a matter of fact, they were already at that moment climbing up the steep ascent to Broys. Colonel Eon and the 2nd battalion of the 77th arrived about the same time at Allemant. Humbert gave his orders to the two chiefs. The most immediate danger was to be parried; Mondement not being accessible till the approaches to it had been cleared, it sufficed provisionally that Colonel Lestoquoi should establish himself strongly with one of his battalions at the northern boundary of the Mondement wood, at the axis of the road which ascends Hill 213; that he should send another of his battalions to the west of the wood, north of the pond called the Petite-Marelle. At the same time, Colonel Eon, who was in command

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of the 77th, detached from Allemant, took this battalion by way of the Châtaigneraie towards the eastern boundary of the wood. The objective of the two leaders for the time being was to act against the enemy's flank, which was attempting to advance by the clearing of Montgivroux. They must not allow him to debouch from the wood.

From 11.50 this objective was attained. The 2nd battalion under Major de Beaufort occupied the southern boundary of the Allemant wood; the 3rd battalion under Major de Courson was stationed near the Petite-Marelle pond, and joined up with the 1st battalion under Major de Merlis. A battery of the Morocco division under Captain de Bornu de Laragne, which had not left the edge of the wood, supported the operation with a machine-gun section of zouaves. In the course of this advance, Colonel Lestoquoi, encountering the Enaux battalion of the 208th, ordered it to support the Merlis battalion. Everything was going well. The preliminaries of the operation had evidently succeeded, and Humbert showed himself well satisfied. Suddenly the report went round that there was no need to push the advance further, that Mondement was captured, and that the tirailleurs of the Morocco division were already installed there.

Colonel Lestoquoi, who was a little sceptical of this news, wished to satisfy himself regarding it, and set out with Major de Courson to make a reconnaissance; two zouaves, who went forward as scouts, were killed by the explosion of a shell. Not only had the enemy not abandoned the castle, but he had completed the

organisation of his defences by making loopholes in the walls of the park and by posting his artillery at its four corners. The village was no less strongly fortified than the castle. Colonel Lestoquoi was able to see with his own eyes how our artillery preparation had everywhere ploughed up the approaches to the place, but how the buildings and the walls were practically intact : hence the necessity of immediately resuming the artillery preparation.

In the interval, the order for the attack on Mondement had arrived. The troops were to take possession of the castle, then to push on to the north-west boundary of the Allemant wood, in which it was not known what had become of the zouaves. At 2.30 Colonel Lestoquoi informed Colonel Eon that he was ready, and only awaited the support of the 75 mm. guns. There was not time to receive the reply : the fire had stretched out, and Major de Beaufort with his battalion and two companies of zouaves and tirailleurs collected in the woods, prepared to charge.

But first, writes a soldier who was present, " M. de Beaufort, ardent Catholic as he was, felt the need of commending himself and his men to God. He called a soldier-priest, Corporal Gallard, from the ranks and asked him to give final absolution to such as wished to receive it." <sup>1</sup> These soldiers were Vendéans, lads from Cholet. They all fell on their knees.

Even to-day the few survivors of that moving scene cannot recall it without emotion. The companies were

<sup>1</sup> See in the Appendix the complete account of the attack, written by this soldier, *The 77th at Mondement*.

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massed about 500 metres from the castle, which they were about to attack by the kitchen garden on the south; the 5th and 7th companies were to follow the Broyes road, which led up to the entrance; the 6th and 8th were to defile by the wood and utilise such cover as it offered. The enemy artillery was searching for this force towards the Ventes de Linthes, where they believed it still to be. The men were "calm and confident"; some were even joking, caressing the points of their bayonets. But one by one "the smell of powder, the game of death, touched them." Major de Beaufort had drawn on his white gloves. He took one last proud look over his battalion. Then he lifted his cane: "Forward! For France! Charge!" And he rushed forward, followed by his men.

"It was a charge of dense serried masses," according to the soldier quoted above. "The men shouted and sang. The bugles quickened their call till it became a veritable gymnastic feat. Bullets whistled past. Soldiers fell. Faster! Faster! The fusillade was infernal. A breach was made in the wall of the kitchen garden by one of our 75 mm. guns. Major de Beaufort rushed towards it. He stopped for a moment at the foot of a tree to decide on his tactics. 'Ah! no sign of them yet, these Boches!' he murmured. A bullet right in the middle of his forehead stretched him dead on the spot. His men wished to remove his body. But the best way to avenge him was to advance. Lieutenant Génois gathered a few soldiers together and led them towards the breach. 'Go through by the breach, my lads! By the breach! we will make a

fine shell !' A private called Durand prepared to go through when Lieutenant Parpaillon put his hand on Durand's shoulder : ' Stop. Let me go first.' ' Go on, sir,' replied Durand, ' I follow you.' "

It was magnificent, the fine spirit of emulation between officers and men ! Parpaillon was already on the breach, his sword in his hand, shouting the cry which since early morning had been on the lips of every officer ; which only died down in one throat to be taken up with greater vigour by another : " Forward ! . . ." The shout died in his throat : the walls of the castle were pierced by loopholes from which the enemy shot us down point-blank. Captain Secondat-Montesquieu, who had also reached the wall, his sword drawn, prepared with Atlé his orderly to jump into the court : the same bullet levelled the heir to one of the greatest literary names of France and the humble soldier who assisted him. Lieutenant d'Yturbide went forward, and under fire took from the fallen captain his pocket-book and his rosary, precious relics to be sent to the family of the dead hero. . . .

And the hecatomb went on : after de Beaufort, Montesquieu, Parpaillon, Lieutenants Floquet and Rochier ; the latter wounded in the hand refused to stop to have his wound dressed, saying simply, " It is nothing. Forward ! " Second-Lieutenants Noël and Bordin were knocked over ; Captain Henrion, Lieutenant Marchand of the tirailleurs were severely wounded. More than a third of the effectives were out of action. But the charge persisted, the bugles continued to

## The 9th of September I I I

sound ; the soldiers, who had hoisted each other up on to the wall, forming themselves into a sort of ladder, shot at the grey uniforms over the top. In front of the chief entrance a zouave was seen to take cover behind the gate, and quite calmly—as if shooting at the butts—take aim and pick off his man with every shot.

But it was all no use. At 3.30 in the afternoon, Colonel Eon ordered Captain Villers to fall back with the remnants of the 2nd battalion, caught in the flank by German machine-gun fire. Colonel Lestoquoi transmitted the same order to five companies of the 1st and 3rd battalions which had supported de Beaufort. The attack had failed once more. But our men had not given in ; a unit of the 1st battalion, deaf to the bugle call of the retreat, stuck to the crest of the plateau, and continued to fire on the defenders of the farm. Hardly were the companies re-formed when Captain de la Taille, of the 36th brigade, announced that after a new artillery preparation another assault would be delivered. The men had taken that for granted. Towards five o'clock, Colonel Eon called for volunteers to carry forward two guns of the Naud battery,<sup>1</sup> which, thanks to the dusk, they were able to get within 350 metres of the castle in the direction of the park.<sup>2</sup> Colonel Lestoquoi, on his side, succeeded,

<sup>1</sup> Captain Naud had replaced Major Geiger, who was wounded on the 7th while observing the enemy positions through his field-glasses.

<sup>2</sup> " Finally at four o'clock, a decisive resolve was made. Two guns were taken up so near to the castle that it was even in sight ; after a short but violent artillery preparation, the infantry would make a fresh assault. I accompanied Captain Naud in a reconnaissance of emplace-



through the efforts of his intermediary, Staff-Lieutenant Canonge (son of the General), in pushing forward a gun to within 400 metres of the principal entrance.<sup>1</sup> In less than ten minutes thirty-six melinite shells fired from this one gun fell in a sudden gust on the gates and the offices.

"Come on, my lads! Forward, brave fellows!" cried Colonel Lestoquoi to his men. "One last push and we are there!"

Three of his companies made a rush at the castle; four others threw themselves on the village. Night fell. It was just half-past six. At 6.40 Colonel Lestoquoi received orders to stop the attack,<sup>2</sup> but he tried

ments for the guns. We walked along the Broyes-Mondement road till the road from the castle was in sight. We were therefore about 300 metres from the southern façade. After consultation with Colonel Eon, and in presence of Lieutenant Canonge of General Humbert's staff, the two guns were taken up as silently as possible by the infantry. Night began to fall. . . . Captain Naud was in command of the gun on the left; I took the gun on the right. He bombarded the castle and the enclosure to the right; I aimed at the tower and the enclosure to the left. The walls were torn open by our explosives, the offices were set on fire." (Lieutenant Alouis' Journal.)

<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps not unimportant to state clearly that Lieutenant Canonge, charged by General Humbert to carry the order for the renewal of the assault, took forward this gun to Colonel Lestoquoi, forestalling the latter's desire, and that this was not, therefore, as has been said, a chance coincidence.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is contested. "The order was never given," we are told. "On the contrary, Captain Canonge, a staff officer of General Humbert, was sent to carry a message to Colonel Eon and Colonel Lestoquoi, ordering them to resume the assault at nightfall with the support of guns taken right up to within a short distance of the castle. Captain Canonge remained there, to ensure that Humbert's instructions were fully carried out, and did not return to headquarters till the



A GERMAN TRENCH ON THE MARNE



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in vain to arrest the victorious enthusiasm of his troops. "A military order," said Napoleon, "only demands passive obedience except when it is given by a superior, who being on the spot at the moment when he gives the order, has exact knowledge of the situation." At any rate, the colonel went on, leading his last company (the 9th, Captain Chausse), which he rushed right up to the gates of the principal entrance. The church, the farm, the park, and the castle were captured. The operation was carried through by man force, and with extraordinary speed and abandon. Colonel Lestoquoi, Major de Courson, and Staff-Captain Béziers-la-Fosse entered the castle, whence the garrison had fled,<sup>1</sup> without a shot being fired. A few houses in the village were still held by German soldiers; our men battered in the doors with their muskets and rushed inside. It was a hand-to-hand conflict, each man for himself. The remnants of de Beaufort's battalion, eager to avenge their fallen leader, rushed, in their turn, on to the plateau. All the enemy troops who had escaped the bayonets of the 77th regiment during the night were to fall under the enfilading fire of the two companies of tirailleurs, posted on the north-western outskirts of the Allemant wood,

affair was successfully over. The order is to be found duly entered in the records of the division." But would it have been strange if Humbert, advised of the German retreat and knowing that Mondement would have fallen of itself in due course, had decided to countermand the attack? That, at least, is how we interpret the decision which has been attributed to him.

<sup>1</sup> Except for a dozen men, who were taken prisoners, and two machine-guns.

and of the company of zouaves whose machine-guns swept the Reuves road. At seven o'clock in the evening the last convulsions of the struggle ceased: the silence round Mondement was broken only by the groans of the dying, the cries of the wounded. In the great Louis XV. salon, under the colours of the 77th, Colonel Lestoquoi had gathered his officers together to mourn the losses of the regiment and to acclaim its victory. He summed up the situation with true military brevity in a laconic dispatch he sent to the commander of the Morocco division:

"I hold the village and castle of Mondement. I remain there overnight."

By a curious coincidence, the 77th infantry regiment, which had given further proof on this day of its marvellous qualities of endurance and activity, had in front of it the 77th Prussian infantry, as well as units of the 164th Hanovers. And truly the carnage around the castle was great.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The steward of the castle reported "that whole battalions were annihilated. In the park alone nearly 3000 German dead were counted, two generals among them." (P. Fabreguettes, *op. cit.*) Elie C . . . says only that "many German dead lay stretched about the walks, the kitchen garden and the park of the castle." (See Appendix.) M. Gabriel Faure in his noble and pathetic *Paysages de Guerre*, speaks also of a salon in the castle, "where two officers, killed by the explosion of one of our shells, remained in the positions in which death had surprised them, the one sitting at the piano, the other playing the violin." The incident did occur, but not at Mondement. According to M. Troclot, a merchant of Sézanne, and an eye-witness, it happened at Reclus, in the farm of the old abbey, where the enemy had left twenty of his own wounded and five or six wounded Frenchmen under the charge of a nurse.

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The wheeling movement of von Bülow's front had already commenced : the order to retreat had been received by the various units about five o'clock.<sup>1</sup> It was only a strong rearguard which had defended the castle.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Too soon for the neighbouring units of the Xth corps and the Morocco division. " During the whole day," wrote Lieutenant Alouis in his Journal, " I saw distinctly through my field-glasses the far-distant roads towards the north-east black with columns of all arms, which moved away ceaselessly into the distance. This splendid objective was unfortunately out of range (eight to ten kilometres). I only succeeded in reaching isolated motor lorries and bodies of cavalry."

<sup>2</sup> Peace has at last descended on Mondement. Two springs and two summers have sufficed for the kindly hand of Nature to efface from the countryside the wounds laid open by the war. But the skeleton of the castle remains. It raises its tragic memories high above the marshes. At night a light gleams forth from it as of old. In the eastern tower, unroofed and three-quarters demolished, the steward still lights the " flare " of Mondement every night—a simple lamp with a steady flame, visible from all points of the horizon. From time immemorial, till September 5, 1914, this lamp was lighted regularly by the goodwill of the lords of the castle, to allow belated travellers to see their way in safety across the winding paths of this treacherous district. But, like the funereal lights which used to shine in the Middle Ages in the " lanterns of the dead," the " flare " of Mondement now illumines nothing but graves. In the little village cemetery round the unfortunate church, of which a pious hand has patched the roof pierced by many shells, at great personal risk, the remains of some of the great protagonists of the drama lie in separate graves : Major de Beaufort, Captain Jean de Secondat-Montesquieu, Chief-Surgeon Baur, Second-Lieutenant Noël, Lieutenant Parpaillon, Sergeant Atlé, and many others less famous, though doubtless no less worthy of honour. The tirailleurs of Morocco lie under white tombstones on the edge of the plateau ; our metropolitan troops, in front of the garden wall, in a meadow beside the Broyes road. Zouaves and foot soldiers fraternise in death, as they fraternised in the struggle and in the victory. There are no names over these graves. A cross, a few flowers, the tricoloured

Be that as it may, the capture of Mondement and of its steep slopes at seven o'clock in the evening was a crowning glory to the fine success obtained on our left by General Defforges and the Xth corps. There also, over the whole front, Charleville — Corfélix — Le Thout, the Xth corps (put at the disposal of General Foch by Franchet d'Espérey to "fill up the gap" which the departure of the 42nd division had caused) made but slow progress at first towards Bannay, which had been determined as its objective. But the Germans had not reoccupied Soizy, firmly held by the 162nd regiment and the chasseurs under Major Clavel, who expected to debouch towards the Petit-Morin at dawn. The moral of these valiant troops had never been so high. They had been annoyed at the news of their transfer to another part of the battlefield. That order had been brought towards five o'clock in the morning by Staff-Captain Cannone.

"They send us away just when we are holding the enemy!" cried the men with tears of rage.

But the truth was that from Soizy to Clos-le-Roi, the most easterly point of the forest of Gault, the German front formed a ring of iron round la Ville-neuve-lès-Charleville, a ring which we had not yet succeeded in breaking. Moreover, the fall of Mondement had straightened out the salient which cockade of the *Souvenir français*, and, on a black ground in letters of gold, these beautiful lines of Henri Regnier :

Mais tandis que montait au ciel avec fureur  
 La sinistre, farouche et barbare clameur,  
 Se mêlait, en réponse à cette voix haineuse,  
 La chanson d'Aisne-et-Marne au chant de Sambre-et-Meuse. . . .

## The 9th of September 117

we had thrust into the enemy's lines to the north of Saint-Gond, and assured him free communication over the marshes. The situation of the Xth corps might have been very critical if Franchet d'Espérey—whose brilliant and decisive part in the battle has never been sufficiently recognised—advised of the resistance encountered by Defforges, had not ordered his 1st corps, which commanded the plateau of Vauchamp, to proceed towards the south-east, attacking the extremity of the enemy's line towards Baye and Villevenard. Von Bülow, who had already lost Montmirail that morning, saw himself threatened in the rear by this attack, and may already have thought of retiring. It was at this moment, about one o'clock in the afternoon—according to a letter from General Anthoine to the Bishop of Chalons—that Abbé Laplaige, the good Curé of la Villeneuve-lès-Charleville, who had stayed beside his flock during the whole of the battle, "seeing an artillery reconnaissance pass through the village, went up to the lieutenant-colonel<sup>1</sup> and offered to give him information as to the enemy's positions. Abbé Laplaige led the colonel up to the skylight of a granary, and from this height pointed out to him with absolute precision the enemy batteries, as well as an important centre of communications, a point through which the German troops were obliged to pass in their retreat."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel de Gensac, of the 50th artillery regiment of Rennes.

<sup>2</sup> From a letter of February 29, 1916. General Anthoine added incidentally, "The lieutenant-colonel of artillery, who put his newly gained information to good use, finished his account of the affair by saying that it seemed to him 'only just to acknowledge the conduct



The most dangerous of these batteries—six 105 mm. guns, which swept the whole plateau and arrested the progress of our troops—was defiled to the right of the road from Thoult-Trosnay to Fromentières, in the district known as la Briquetrie.<sup>1</sup> Caught by the fire of our 75's,<sup>2</sup> crushed to pieces with their gunners, the batteries ceased to exist: the road was free for our troops; they carried Corfélix with a rush, and went on towards Talus.

of the brave Curé, who, after all, risked being shot without question, if a return offensive had put the Germans again in possession of la Villeneuve.' The information furnished by the Abbé was of great value to our artillery, and I feel sure that the thanks to which he is undoubtedly entitled would have much higher value for him if conveyed to him by Your Highness."

There is a slight mistake in General Anthoine's letter. Lieutenant-Colonel Gensac's observation point was not a granary, but the ladder of a reservoir at the extreme end of the village. "In the evening, at nightfall," we are told by one of the principal actors in the affair, "our 75 mm. guns fired to the full extent of their range on the village of Baye, eight kilometres to the north. That stirred up the Germans, who were about to have a meal, and were congregated round their field-kitchens, the officers' tables being near by." The effect of the firing was seen by the French next day in their advance to have been terrible, and this view was confirmed by the inhabitants.

<sup>1</sup> A distinguished correspondent, M. Merlin, Counsellor-General of the Canton of Montmirail, tells us that the batteries were emplaced along the road which crosses from la Mortière to Bannay. "I can tell you the position exactly," he writes: "the gunners who served it are buried at the very place where the battery was destroyed."

<sup>2</sup> "This war is above all a war of positions, that is, of finding out the positions of the enemy: in the case of two batteries, the first very powerful but not knowing the position of the second; it is the second, even though more feeble, which wins the day, if it has discovered the position of the first." (Charles Nordmann in the *Matin* of November 18, 1915.)

## The 9th of September 119

The enemy had staggered under the blow. But he continued to persist on our right, where von Hausen, with great masses of troops, had advanced as far as Gourgançon, the Guard as far as Connantre.<sup>1</sup> In fact, towards nine o'clock in the morning, the 21st division had been obliged to relinquish the positions so hardly won the day before, positions which it had defended with extraordinary fury. Thrown back from Cuvy, Radiguet re-formed his forces to the south of Corroy, on Hill 129, and attempted to hold on there, but he had now only the skeleton of a division ;<sup>2</sup> the Saxon

<sup>1</sup> They arrived about one o'clock, " forty-four years to the day since the entry they had made in '70," as Férat the agent remarked. Our troops had been held up for some time half-way to Fère, notably in front of the farm of Saint-Georges, where the 23rd company of the 290th had a furious encounter, in the course of which Lieutenant Beugnet was killed. The Saxons arrived about the same time at Gourgançon, which they had bombarded since ten o'clock. The curé, M. Deniset, was wounded in his cellar by the explosion of a shell. " Most of the fighting took place at Mont-Martin, to the north of the Maurienne about 1200 metres from here," said one of the country police. " Most of the dead were found there. The struggle was very sanguinary. One sergeant killed nine Germans at the entrance to the village : his men deserted him, and he took cover alone behind a hedge and fired until he himself was killed." The Saxon troops who occupied Gourgançon belonged for the most part to the 102nd, 104th, 106th, 107th, and 133rd infantry regiments, active and reserve, and to the 13th chasseurs : only three or four of the eighty-five Germans buried in the territory of this commune belonged to the Grenadiers of the Guard ; at Connantre, on the contrary, the fifty-nine Germans buried there all belonged to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th regiments of the Guard and to the 1st Grenadiers. The cemetery contains also the graves of three French officers, Lieutenants Gayot of the 3rd Engineers, Riche and Lebé of the 125th infantry regiment.

<sup>2</sup> " My regiments fought admirably," he wrote from Corroy at 9.50, " but they were reduced on an average to four or five officers."

troops manoeuvred behind a screen of heavy artillery, which cleared the ground in front of them, pulverising all resistance : from Corroy, Radiguet was obliged to descend on Fresnay, then on Faux, and Moussy's division, drawing back its right little by little to guard the contact of the two forces, found itself constrained to a similar movement. Some of Moussy's units, like the 135th, had lost two-thirds of their original strength ; the 103rd brigade (Colonel Doursoult), which extended from Moussy's division towards Morains, and the 104th brigade of the Battesti division (Lieutenant-Colonel Claudon), which defended the northern slopes of Mont-Août, had suffered no less from the terrible high-angle fire which the enemy directed on them from Toulon. A feeble bulwark in truth, this mere handful of effectives, to oppose the tide which flowed towards it from three sides, and threatened to blockade it on its island ! The 103rd brigade, the most exposed, was the first to give way.

“ On to the vast plain which extends from the foot of Mont-Août,” writes a military witness of the scene,<sup>1</sup> “ the French debouched from the wood, at first by twos and threes, and then in dense masses. They were beating a retreat towards the west. Cavalry tearing along at a furious gallop, spurring on their horses ; ammunition waggons flying past over the ruts, their drivers crouching low over their teams, urging them on with hurried blows. Grey uniforms came running out of the woods in skirmishing order, and, throwing themselves down, joined their salvos to the volleys of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Henri Libermann, *op. cit.*

## The 9th of September 121

our own men. From the north, from the east, from the south, German guns levelled on the plain, spat forth their shells, covering the plain with heaps of shrapnel, ploughing it up with the ugly black hollows of their heavy shells. A tremendous fusillade caught the trenches of the chasseurs in the rear. . . .”

To escape being totally surrounded, the 104th brigade in its turn broke off the struggle, and retreated in fairly good order towards Saint-Loup. Moussy alone held on to the eastern slopes of Mont-Août. But he had no troops there save his 135th regiment, reduced to 1200 men. And the Prussian Guards were upon him!

They carried the slopes and threw the 135th back on Sainte-Sophie, but this gallant regiment only fell back on the left in order to counter-attack on the right. Definitely broken in this heroic charge, in which it lost its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Graux, Majors Pons and Noblet, and nearly all its officers, the regiment halted, wheeled round, and streamed back towards the south. Moussy, now uncovered on both flanks, could no longer hold the front which Dubois had hastily improvised for him with units of the 52nd division, gathered together along the roads: he therefore drew back the 33rd brigade, but kept his artillery in action on the ridge of Mont-Chalmont, threw the 68th regiment into the wood of Hill 144, the 90th into that of Sainte-Sophie, and on this chance position made one last effort.

It was half-past four in the afternoon. The 42nd division was expected every moment—it should have

arrived at midday, then at two o'clock, then at four—and it had not yet turned up. What had happened to it? Why had it not arrived? Had it changed its objective *en route*? Had it gone to the help of Humbert instead of descending on Pleurs? It alone could save the army, which seemed otherwise past all possibility of help, save by divine intervention—which every new effort of the enemy threatened with total annihilation, and which Foch sought to inspire by optimistic bulletins, appeals to the energy of the race, communications as to the progress—alas! how slow!—of Grossetti.<sup>1</sup> All this great broken force, already at its last gasp, anxiously awaited the arrival of the 42nd division, longed for it, implored that it might yet be in time. Foch sent messenger after messenger; Moussy detached two squadrons of the 7th hussars to ride out to meet it. A dreadful agony of suspense hung over all. It was comparable to that of Constantine, crushed by Maxentius, lifting his eyes to the heavens imploring their aid; to Clovis invoking the God of Clotilda; to Roland sounding his horn; to Napoleon listening eagerly for Grouchy, and hearing instead the approaching steps of Blücher.

<sup>1</sup> This "slowness" is easily explained. The force was not relieved till eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and the 151st was not able to rally its troops till about one o'clock in the afternoon. The 162nd, nearer at hand, had commenced the movement and advanced in the direction Broyes-Péas-Saint-Loup, in shelter of the crest of the Hill of Allemant and of the Signal de Chalmont; the 151st followed, the 83rd brigade was in the second line, leaving the 18th battalion of chasseurs to support the Morocco division; the movement was preceded by the 10th regiment of mounted chasseurs.

## The 9th of September 123

The fate of the army seemed decided: two divisions were cut off from the main army, and von Hausen was driving them like dead leaves before him. Already enemy forces had been able to filter through by the Vaure valley: they pushed on towards Pleurs, towards Salon. . . .

A happy, perhaps even a decisive moment for our adversaries, had the other corps of the Second and Third German Armies been able to follow up the movement, had the advance been made all along the line. But von Bülow, after his precarious success at Mondement, refused to move again, as if wedged in by his conquest,<sup>1</sup> and our Fourth Army, which had fallen back on the 8th before Saxon divisions, was fighting actively on the 9th towards Ormet, les Fenus and la Folie. Moreover, de l'Espée's forces remained intact, although he had been obliged to abandon Mailly according to orders, to preserve the alignment, after having held on to that position during the whole of the 8th and the morning of the 9th with his cyclists and dragoons. The wedge which von Hausen and the Guards drove into the hinge of the French armies, exposed the German forces to dangerous lateral movements: ill-protected towards Humbauville, von

<sup>1</sup> "The enemy no longer shows any activity. His heavy artillery seems dead; the attack on Mondement was arrested after the fall of the castle. This arrest, which is still unexplained, after the furious attacks and bombardments of the previous day, was an inexpressible relief to us. Why did the enemy not continue to fire? Why did he not attack? In consequence, they say, of the success obtained by the army on our left. A vague explanation, with which, however, we must be content." (Lieutenant Alouis' Journal.)

Hausen in particular uncovered his right flank completely to our attack, which fell on it like a thunderbolt from the moment when Foch had the 42nd division at his disposal.

At last the 42nd arrived ; it swept down the slopes, Grossetti at its head on horseback, a terrible and magnificent figure against the golden background of the setting sun, a very God of Battles.<sup>1</sup> An enemy aeroplane flew over from the direction of Broyes : at Saint-Loup it darted like a bird towards its own lines. Did it hasten to warn the enemy to fall back instantly, that in retreat alone could he escape disaster ? The moment had at last come for the former professor of the *École de Guerre* to apply his principle : " If by any fortunate chance, any happy inspiration, we catch a glimpse of a fissure in the edifice, or a point of inadequate resistance, and if, by a particular combination of forces, we can add to the regular and methodical action of a flood the sudden blow of a battering-ram, capable of breaking down the edifice at one point—the equilibrium is broken : the mass hurls itself as speedily as possible through the breach, and carries every obstacle before it." <sup>2</sup>

The " fissure " was there : in order to break the fragile scaffolding of the German combinations, Foch had only to level against the desired point the blow of the

<sup>1</sup> Libermann, *op. cit.* : " The sun, sinking fast, reddened the western sky in one last embrace ; its last rays lit on General Grossetti, on horseback in the midst of his staff. Everything was subordinated to that great central figure. Immovable as an equestrian statue, he was the incarnation of triumph, the typification of victory."

<sup>2</sup> *Principes de Guerre*, chapter x. p. 280.

## The 9th of September 125

battering-ram, that was in this case the 42nd division : the whole force could then follow through the breach.

The order for a general offensive is given. The call to arms is sounded : some regiments have neither colonel nor superior officer ;<sup>1</sup> companies are commanded by sergeants ; a magnetic redressing takes place all along the line ; nothing more remains to be done ; the whole division feels itself supported as if by some interior power, carried forward irresistibly as if on some mighty wave. Marvellous buoyancy of the French spirit !

Without losing a minute, Dubois, as soon as he was informed of the arrival of units from the head of Grossetti's division (which was to counter-attack in the direction of Connantre-Cœuvy, seconded by all available units of the IXth and XIth army corps), changed his own dispositions to fall in with the new order ; the 104th brigade held on firmly to the Heights of Chalmont, supported by all the artillery of the 17th division and that of the 52nd " not employed towards the north." All available units of the 17th division were to attack at the Nozet farm and at Morains-le-Petit ; the 103rd brigade was to attack the farm of Sainte-Sophie and Plateau 166, in liaison with the 17th and with Grossetti's division. . . .

At six o'clock in the evening, supported by three brigades of artillery, the 42nd division hurled itself in

<sup>1</sup> " I found the 135th crippled : neither colonel nor any superior officer ; and I sent it forward nevertheless ! " (General Moussy's Journal of the Campaign.)



articular formation from the front Linthes-Lintheles towards the hollow of Œuvy, of which its mounted patrols had previously reconnoitred the approaches.

At eight o'clock, two other brigades under Colonel Boichut concentrated their fire on the further side of Connantre, where the railway line branched off towards Fère-Champenoise and commanded the entrance to that village, relegated to Moussy as his objective. The main body of the 42nd division halted and bivouacked at Pleurs and the neighbouring woods. But Colonel Simon with the 33rd brigade (three battalions of the 90th, two battalions of the 68th and half a squadron of the 7th hussars) continued the pursuit as far as Nozet, Puits and Morains-le-Petit. Such was the activity of this force, that after half-an-hour's halt at Nozet, to let the men have some food, the Colonel decided to march on right through the night, without taking precautions lest he should lose touch with the 103rd brigade, which only progressed slowly towards the farm of Sainte-Sophie. Moussy, who did not learn till two o'clock in the morning of this *tour-de-force* of his brigadier (the messenger sent to him by Colonel Simon had lost his way in the night), at once hurried up with his reserves towards Fère-Champenoise, to support the 33rd brigade.

He entered Fère at five o'clock without a shot having been fired. At the same hour the 42nd division entered Connantre, also practically without resistance,<sup>1</sup> and it

<sup>1</sup> The castle itself resisted for a brief space, but the garrison surrendered at once on the promise that the lives of the men should be spared. By way of precaution, it was stipulated that they should come

## The 9th of September 127

appeared—as at Mondement before the 77th, as at Gourgauçon before Eydoux, as at Fère itself before Moussy—that the enemy had only left a curtain of troops, a mere façade of effectives : the alarm given by the aeroplane had been heard.

On the evening of the 8th, according to Abbé Néret, and on the afternoon of the 9th, according to an eyewitness, M. Bonnemain,<sup>1</sup> Fère-Champenoise was transformed into a fair : the reserves of the Guard, who had been in cantonments up till then in the suburbs of Connantre, spread all over the town towards three o'clock. And as practice for their subsequent operations, they pillaged several houses on the way. After that, it was methodical and organised pillage ; only the houses and shops without men folk were robbed. Later on, orgies were arranged. Before the Hôtel de Paris, a piano was carried out into the street : music was struck up in front of the church, the audience "seated on benches and ammunition waggons." Champagne gushed forth in streams. The officers lolled in basket

out one by one. "The manoeuvre," said Lieutenant Libermann, "was effected in good order. At regular intervals the Prussians came out and laid down their rifles. In a neighbouring pathway they were lined up two deep : the chasseurs took them in charge with fixed bayonets. The officer came last : 'Here is my pistol. You are stronger than we to-day, and we give in. To-morrow, perhaps, you will have to submit in your turn to the supreme humiliation. That is my hope. Oberleutnant Schwartz of the 4th Grenadiers of the Guard.'" Counting all together, wounded and unwounded, H. Libermann estimates the number of prisoners taken at Connantre at 500 men of the 1st, 2nd and 4th Grenadiers of the Guard.

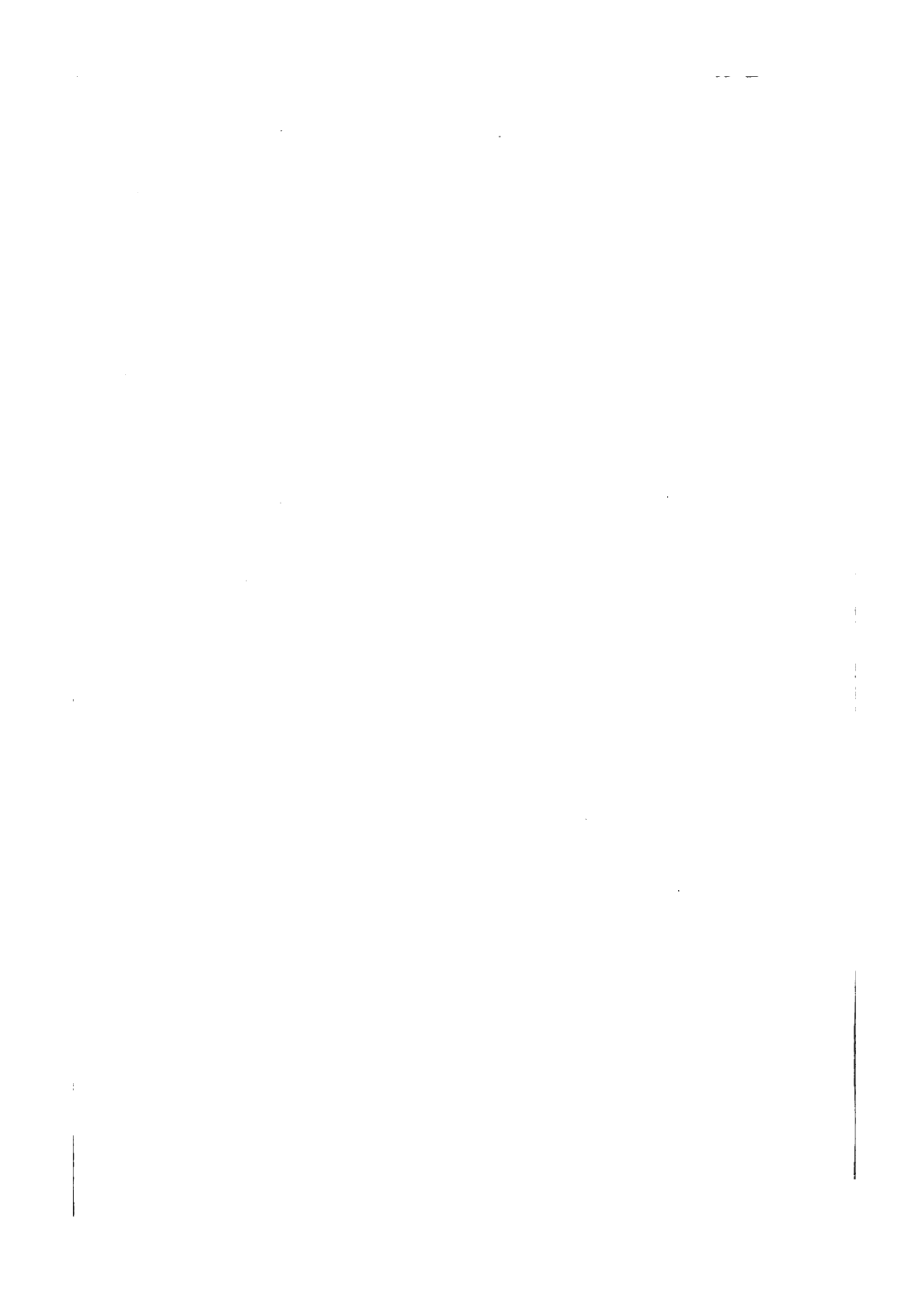
<sup>1</sup> But it is possible that though the orgy commenced on the 8th, it may have been continued on the 9th.

chairs on the pavement ; their tunics unbuttoned, cigars between their lips, they surveyed the scene complacently through their monocles. This drunken mob had almost the appearance of a Hottentot masquerade, for a neighbouring chapel had been robbed, and the vandals returned with fantastic coverings on their heads. They drank and ate greedily, they danced, they shouted barbarous songs to the glory of the Fatherland. What festival, after all, was being celebrated in this orgy of the flesh-pots ? A wounded French soldier was taken past in a handbarrow : the Germans hooted him.<sup>1</sup> Sword-belts unbuckled, haversacks thrown down in heaps, rifles stacked against the walls—everything bore witness to the absolute security in which these scoundrels believed themselves to be.

But suddenly, towards five o'clock, a mounted officer galloped up. He shouted an order in a stentorian voice. It was an order of retreat ! The men threw on their kit, snatched their rifles ; the officers demanded the way to Sommesous, to Morains, to Écury-le-Repos from the stupefied inhabitants. Everything was done at express speed, in good order, but without fifes. By six o'clock in the evening there was not a single German in the town, save for a few drunkards who snored in the cellars.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This incident was reported by M. Larcher, the proprietor of the Hôtel de Paris.

<sup>2</sup> But the roads, the fields, the woods round Fère were strewn with German dead, belonging, for the most part, to regiments of the Guard, of the Kaiserin Augusta and the Kaiser Franz. And the wounded swelled the number of the drunkards taken in the cellars. Altogether, about 1500 prisoners were taken, a sufficiently imposing number.





**THE ENTRANCE TO THE PRIORY OF ST. GOND**

## The 9th of September 129

It was not till the next day, at five o'clock in the morning, that the French re-entered Fère.<sup>1</sup> By that time the main part of von Bülow's army had long since recrossed the marshes.

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Simon arrived at three o'clock, but he only touched the hill at the station and pushed straight on to Morains-le-Petit, where other troops joined him later. At five o'clock the rest of the 17th division reached Fère, where Dubois had sent on his main force, and where Foch at midnight set up his headquarters.

## VI

## THE DAWN OF VICTORY

THERE was a current report that Moussy, the future hero of Ypres, had routed the Guard in the Marshes of Saint-Gond, with a division of the IXth corps. Historians have repeated that report. Strictly speaking, he would not have had an impossible task. From Broyes and from Mont-Chalmon, our 75's held the seven roads across the marshes under their fire, roads so straight, so geometrical, that they could be enfiladed right across from one side of the marshes to the other. Over nearly the whole extent of these roads, it was impossible for the Germans to step aside one yard to the right or to the left under pain of being sucked into the marshes. If our artillery had been in action, the Germans would have had to choose between being wiped out by shell-fire or being swallowed up by the marshes. Why did our artillery not intervene? Did it lack shells, as has been supposed, at the last moment? Our aeroplanes, which had been so active in furnishing information during the battle—had they failed in some way towards the end? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It was the air service, on the contrary, which informed us at 5.30 of the German retreat, though it had been begun sooner by a part of von Bülow's army. The *Memento paroissial* of Vertus informs us that towards two o'clock on the 9th a French aeroplane passed over between Bergères and Vertus: "It was Brindejonc of the Moulinais

## The Dawn of Victory 131

The explanation is even more simple. What happened to Manoury's army had happened also to the Ninth Army. It is known that the Sixth Army, on the morning of September 10th, at the moment when it was about to recommence the offensive on its extreme left, found, according to M. Roland, "hardly any troops left in front of it." During the preceding night the enemy had fled, noiselessly, towards the north, east of the Ourcq, covering its retreat by strong rearguards. It acted in exactly the same way as von Bülow's army had done, as part of von Hausen's army had done. "On the evening of the 9th," writes Second-Lieutenant M . . . ,<sup>1</sup> "we were at Linthes, and I was put on guard with my company to cover the arrival of the 42nd division, which was hurrying to our aid. It was high time. The next day the various companies pushed forward, when, to our great surprise, we found that the Germans were no longer there. That was at ten o'clock in the morning." Before Mondement and before Saint-Prix the enemy lines were cleared. Till the morning of the 10th, they had been filled by bodies of troops whose deep voices had disturbed the silence of the night. The

who prepared a masterstroke against the enemy encampments; his projectiles killed a dozen men and about forty horses. The enemy fired on him at once, but did not hit the brave pilot, who regained his own lines to the south." (See Appendix, extract from Brindejonc's *Journal de bord*.)

<sup>1</sup> From the *Courrier de Sézanne* of September 10, 1915. See also Henri Libermann, *op. cit.*: "It is empty space, vast empty space. But one stumbles over dead bodies, one remembers with a start the tragedies, forgotten for a moment. Not a shot is heard, not an enemy seen. . . ."



inhabitants from their cellars did not know what to make of this move. "Troops are passing," wrote M. Roland. "Are they going or are they coming? No one knows. The walls of the Castle of Mondement are blazing. A house near Broussy is on fire; the sky is red with the glow of incendiary fires, at Villeneuve, at Royes, at Reuves and so on. The French guns still fire occasionally, but at ever lengthening intervals, then everything falls back into the silence of the night. . . . The next day, at half-past five in the morning, in full daylight, the same silence still reigns."

And seeing that the silence really continues, our troglodytes finally think they may venture to have a look round outside. They find the little cowherd who has brought their food every morning. They question him eagerly: the child assures them that there are no longer any "Boches" in sight. The battle is finished. Upon which, these cave-dwellers leave their hiding-places and descend, like a file of Indians, through the vineyards towards the village. But at the corner of the Grands-Puits road they come suddenly upon "a band of Germans who are going up in silence towards Congy;" their leader, "who has a drum on his back and a Red-Cross brassard on his arm," asks M. Roland in good French where the 104th German infantry regiment is to be found. M. Roland replies that the 164th is stationed in the village. "Not now," replies the Boche, who continues on his way without further remark.

These were the last stragglers of the Xth corps of von Bülow's army, the outposts perhaps and the dis-

## The Dawn of Victory 133

abled, whom it had not been possible to inform as to the hour of the retreat, so hastily arranged.<sup>1</sup>

Five minutes later, a troop of French cuirassiers entered the village. The populace acclaimed them as the first radiant messengers of victory. Seated erect on their saddles, their horses' manes flowing, they drew rein, powdered by the yellow dust of the Oyes road. M. Roland told them of the meeting with the German stragglers.

"If you had only arrived five minutes sooner," he said, "you would have caught them."

"We will catch them yet," they replied, and they spurred on.

<sup>1</sup> A French civilian, M. Prévost, secretary to the *Mairie* of Fère, whom the Germans took away with them, told us that in spite of his advanced years he was forced to walk forty kilometres in the direction of Aulnizeux on the night of the 9th. The arrest of M. Prévost has given rise to many fables. One journal of the Marne district reported that some German staff-officers were about to occupy the Hôtel de Ville. "Suddenly they became immovable, thunderstruck. Before them, his face wreathed in smiles, stood an august personage, M. Prévost, who resembles M. Poincaré in a most striking way, feature for feature. Without making any further inquiries, the officers telegraphed and telephoned in all directions. The Crown Prince himself was told of the capture. The error was not found out till later, but the unfortunate secretary paid for it with his liberty." The real facts are totally different. M. Prévost told us himself that he was arrested simply because two clocks in the town, one in the afternoon, and one during the night, were heard to strike. The Germans, always suspicious, thought they saw a signal in that, and arrested M. Prévost, who, taken first to Cassel, then to the Castle of Hassenberg (Saxe-Coburg), was not set at liberty till March 24, 1915. During the battle and afterwards, he was obliged to accompany the Prussian troops on foot, exposed to the same fire, and forced, without regard for his grey hairs, to the same formidable marches.

But nearly everywhere the enemy was a march in advance of us, and his rearguards were strongly supported. At the two extremities of the marshes, at Morains-le-Petit, which the 33rd brigade reached towards 5.30<sup>1</sup> on the morning of the 10th, by way of Nozet,<sup>2</sup> Puits, and the Heights of Fère, and at Saint-Prix, where the Morocco division was engaged nearly at the same time, the enemy had decamped inconspicuously. At Morains it was because he was taken unawares, assailed suddenly by Colonel Simon, who, in the excitement of the pursuit, forgetting that the rest of the 17th division was some distance away, had flung his forces on the enemy and driven in his lines. The Germans fled before the great cavalry swords of the 7th hussars, which had been thrown on their heels, led by Captain Thomassin. At Saint-Prix they

<sup>1</sup> "We pushed on to Morains-le-Petit, where the 68th and the 90th arrived at 5.30." (General Moussy's Journal.)

<sup>2</sup> "Wednesday, September 9 (evening). The 90th and 68th reached Nozet in advance." (General Moussy's Journal.)

The 33rd brigade had left without waiting to be revictualled, so eager was it to catch up the enemy. The 33rd had the honour of being the first of our forces to renew contact with enemy forces. It happened at midnight, at Nozet, after the surrounding woods had been searched with the bayonet. Nothing now remained of the farm but some charred walls. "In the cellar," writes the soldier, Élie C . . ., "we found several dead Germans, one, quite naked, seated on a barrel. We supposed it to be the body of an officer, for, according to current rumour, the German soldiers had been ordered to remove the uniforms of any of their officers found dead drunk, no doubt in order to save the honour of the Prussian caste."

It must be remembered that the 135th and a battalion of the 68th had been held in reserve with Moussy and Colonel Genot near Linthes, and were not aware till later of Colonel Simon's rapid progress towards Morains.

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had simply tried to block up the road by a barricade of poplars, but instead of lying quietly across the road, says Abbé Néret, "those great trees of France, as if conscious of the part they were called on to play, fell down on each side into the river, and our troops passed on. Things did not go quite so well to the east of the marshes, notably at Pierre-Morains and at Écury-le-Repos, where the 347th battalion of the line hurled itself about four o'clock in the afternoon on to a strong Saxon rearguard, an attack in which three officers, one of them the commanding officer, and 250 men were killed.<sup>1</sup> A second attempt, early in the night, led by Lieutenant-Colonel de Salins, with troops of the 103rd brigade, cost the life of Captain d'Annoville, the victim of a dastardly German ruse.<sup>2</sup> The 52nd division

<sup>1</sup> "Towards four o'clock in the evening we arrived at Écury-le-Repos, where our regiment threw itself on a strong Saxon rearguard, which, after killing one officer and fifty men, wounding the commanding officer, two captains and about two or three hundred men, prevented us from passing on." (Letter from Second-Lieutenant Firmin M . . . in the *Courrier de Sézanne* of September 10, 1915.) See also General Moussy's Journal: "The 52nd could not take Écury. Unfruitful action from 5 till 7.30 at Pierre-Morains (68th) and Écury (90th). Fell back on Morains. Slept on some straw in the station. Was cold, very cold." And on the 11th he says, "At Vertus, news of General Leleu, who attacked Pierre-Morains at the same time as we did yesterday, and who must have got some of our shells."

<sup>2</sup> The *Archives Cantonales* of Vertus give this account of the deed: "The 348th regiment of the 103rd brigade was ordered to attempt a night attack on the trenches which surrounded the village. Major Cody led the 6th battalion; Captain d'Annoville left with the 5th. The two sections were afterwards to unite. Towards nine o'clock M. d'Annoville heard the sound of a column on the march, then a voice asked in perfect French, 'Halt! Who goes there?' Thinking that he was facing his friends, the captain answered, 'France! Are

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was obliged to fall back on Morains-le-Petit ; the 33rd brigade had already been reassembled in articular formation, and the pursuit from this side was momentarily suspended.

But in revenge, on the Maurienne and the Vaure, where the magnificent 42nd division was in action, hurled against the flank of von Hausen's army, nothing was suffered to keep it back ; it pursued the enemy closely as far as the Somme. The 84th brigade marched at its head ; the 162nd followed the Linthes-Fère-Champenoise road ; the 151st crossed the fields in the direction of Œuvy, which it left on its right ; the 83rd brigade was behind the 84th ; the divisional cavalry followed the itinerary Corroy-Connantray-Lenharrée. The French were now entering on the high fertile plain—the tomb of the XIth corps. It has been said that at the approach of the 42nd division this immense charnel-house began to palpitate with deep, hidden life. The sun shone out as though it had heard the tramp of our troops. At the edge of the wood, confused forms appeared out of the shadows and rushed towards the soldiers, crying, " Help ! Water ! We have been here for three days ! " They were the wounded from the surprise attack of the 8th, whom the enemy had not taken the trouble to carry away, whom he had left to agonise in this desert, that you the 6th battalion ? ' And the same voice answered, ' Advance ; not all at once ; one at a time. ' The captain did not hesitate ; he went forward, crying, ' Who goes there ? ' The voice replied, ' France, patrol. ' At the same moment a volley of rifle shots rang out. The captain, wounded in three places, fell dead. His men retreated under an intense fusillade."

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the tortures of thirst might finish the work begun by the machine-guns. The plain, as far as the eye could see, was covered with dead bodies, fast decomposing. On this warm September morning, dull, rainy, but without a breath of wind, the smell was such that even the strongest became sick. Boichut confessed that he had felt *mal-de-mer* at Œuvy : Deville speaks of the "Dantesque" impression he carried away from the battlefield of Normée. Human remains were found even right in among the trees.

But the delight of the survivors in learning of our victory, their joy at seeing us again, at receiving our help, our services, their eagerness to tell us sad but splendid incidents of the surprise—all these gradually dissipated the nightmare. The body of Colonel Mézière was identified at the corner of a small wood : a corporal of the 32nd, his leg broken, stopped Colonel Deville before the body of another officer.

"Look, sir," he said. "That is Major Humbert. He fell, a bullet in his back, while trying to organise the retreat : he asked me to turn him round towards the north in order that he might have the honour of dying with his face to the Germans. . . ."

Up till eleven o'clock in the forenoon, no other incident had hindered the march of our troops. But a German division of the XIIth reserve corps, whose artillery was posted behind the Somme, suddenly laid down a violent barrage on the edge of the wood, the railway line, and the station of Normée. The 162nd set out at once, led by Major Moisson and Colonel Trouchaud ; the 151st went to Fontaine-d'Ivoire ;

the Boutain battalion to support the 162nd ; the divisional artillery in batteries towards Hill 172, two kilometres from Connantray ; two brigades of the 46th were posted before Normée, to the right and left of the Fère road. Up till 2.30 it was not possible for our troops to debouch. At that moment, persuaded that a new concentration of his fire would enable him to break the German resistance, Grossetti ordered the 42nd division to advance in three columns in the direction of Villeseneux-Soudron. He was soon obliged to countermand this order. But the estafette charged with carrying it to Colonel Deville was stopped on the road : the 151st, conforming to the preceding order, crossed the Somme at Lenharrée, which the enemy had neglected to guard, and pushed across the wood during the night to Villeseneux, while the columns of Krien and Trouchaud were still immobilised before Normée, the 60th reserve division before Sommesous. The 151st had passed, without knowing it, between two battles. When it did perceive what had happened, it fell back. Rumour will have it that one of the Kaiser's sons <sup>1</sup> was among the troops opposite the 151st, troops who, thinking their rear was turned, hastened to abandon the position. When morning came, Normée, Villeseneux, and Soudron were evacuated. And the pursuit was again taken up all along the line, extending to our flank-guard, which had been back in Mailly with Saily's brigade <sup>2</sup> since the evening of the 9th,

<sup>1</sup> But is this not merely a legend, and does it not again concern the ubiquitous Eitel ? See the Appendix, *The Surprise of Villeseneux*.

<sup>2</sup> It may appear that, contrary to what we have said above, Saily's brigade did not enter Mailly till the morning of the 10th, and contented

while Séréville's brigade, which had supported de Langle's attack on Sompuis the evening before, re-occupied its former positions. If, on the evening of the 10th, de l'Espée had not pushed on further than Poivres-Sainte-Suzanne, it was because he was waiting for Mitry's division, now placed under his command. Some hours were wasted there which might have been better employed. Sommesous, Soudé-Sainte-Croix were not yet cleared of the enemy. But early on the morning of the 11th, the 9th cavalry division—with the exception of Saily's brigade, which de l'Espée had kept at Poivres—reassembled under the command of General de Séréville, sounded the "boot-and-saddle," and rode off for that encircling movement of forty-eight hours' duration, which was carried out at one stretch, and which was to finish on the 13th before Souain, after the capture of the bridges of the Marne by the 5th cuirassiers.<sup>1</sup>

itself the evening before with a demonstration. "All the day," we are told, "we submitted to a cannonade of 150 mm. shells, more impressive than efficacious, on the plateau of the Arbre-de-justice. Towards three o'clock in the afternoon, enemy infantry came out from Maily and drove us back three or four kilometres. An hour later, an officer, Second-Lieutenant Fauquet of the 24th dragoons, carried General Foch's order to General de l'Espée, commanding him to resume the offensive. De l'Espée thereupon sent Saily's brigade and Hangouwart's battery forward to bombard Maily at nightfall. Then the whole division fell further back on Chêne, near Arcis-sur-Aube, and we did not return to Maily till ten o'clock in the morning."

<sup>1</sup> Sommesous, which was attacked by the 6th reserve division, being still in the hands of the enemy, Séréville directed his first efforts on Soudé-Sainte-Croix. He drove out the enemy about ten o'clock, which consequently freed Sommesous. (For an account of the capture of the bridges of the Marne, see the Appendix.)



However methodical the retreat of von Bülow's army and the right wing of von Hausen's army had been, it had not been possible to accomplish it without enormous sacrifices both of men and material. Not having had time to remove their dead and wounded, who were already stretched out in long lines by the roadside, the enemy had simply abandoned them. On the road from Oyes to Villevenard they formed a long funeral alley: in front of the Priory of Saint-Gond, a young German had fallen just when he was attending to his toilet; his little pocket mirror was still lying beside him.

Dead and wounded, ambulance units complete with their sanitary sections, and, like that of Lenharrée, "full of German soldiers, infantry, artillery, Imperial Guard,"<sup>1</sup> broken-down batteries, ammunition wagons torn off their wheels, artillery drag-ropes entangled in the buttresses of the bridges, dumps of ammunition, which there had been no time to carry off, and an extraordinary collection of rifles, cartridge-cases, cartridges, haversacks, field-dressings, packets of letters, tins of jam, joints of meat, empty champagne bottles, and even parts of a cinematograph apparatus—such, with the inevitable laggards which an army in retreat invariably leaves behind it, was all the booty of the first day. The following days were to add to it in no small measure. It is also probable that

<sup>1</sup> Four hundred and fifty men in all. (Letter of a French major written from Connantray on the 14th and quoted by Abbé Néret.) At Congy in the hospital at the castle there were nearly as many wounded Germans; at Baye they numbered more than 500.

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in the course of the retreat the marshes swallowed up some stragglers, but the marshes have kept their secret to this day.

The Germans knew the marshes better than we did: for years, under pretext of shooting wild duck or supplying the farms with artificial fertilisers, their spies had examined every inch of the ground. Some of them even, disguised as shepherds, as cheese-makers, as vendors of light carriages, agents for the little Caiffa carts, had lived in the most intimate way with the inhabitants. When war came they tore off the mask, and took a malicious pleasure in making themselves known to their dupes.<sup>1</sup>

The Marshes of Saint-Gond—Tomb of the Prussian Guard. The formula is arresting, no doubt, and draws a striking picture for the man in the street.<sup>2</sup> But the reality is a hundred times finer than the legend. That which was swallowed up in the marshes, which has definitely foundered in that green grave, is more than a few crack battalions—it is the prestige of the German army and of its pretended invincibility.

At the edge of the plateau to which our troops held

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix: *The Spies*.

<sup>2</sup> Is it necessary to add that nowhere, neither in the *communiqués* nor in the detailed report on the whole operations from August 2 to December 4, 1914, is there the slightest allusion to this "swallowing up" of the Prussian Guard? M. Babin, who may be described as a historical probe, does not breathe a word about it: the authors of *La Guerre en Champagne* only write from memory, and they write as if of a legend which will not bear close examination. One could wish to find the same discretion elsewhere.

so valiantly in the Marne district there is, near Esternay, a beautiful eighteenth-century castle which bears the symbolic name of Réveillon. Was it this name, was it this soil, so rich in history, was it the obscure presentiment of future revenge, or was it perhaps all these together which inspired the artist Detaille ?

Whatever it may have been, "The Dream," the most touching, the most popular of his pictures, was painted at Réveillon during the summer of 1887.<sup>1</sup>

Look at it closely—the sleeping soldiers, their arms piled on a great bare plateau, the fires of the bivouac slowly dying out. It is clearly the plateau of Champagne. But, far away on the horizon at the edge of the plateau—is not the belt of mist mysteriously touched by the first red streaks of dawn ?

And without being too complaisant, is it not permissible to recognise the part played by these heroic mists of the Marshes of Saint-Gond, from which—thanks to the unshakable constancy of Foch, fighting against the most famous troops of Germany—the victory of the Marne rose up, and demanded a place among the most glorious deeds in the history of France ?

<sup>1</sup> Detaille was the guest of another celebrated artist, Mme. Madeleine Lemaire, whose daughter, Mlle. Suzanne Lemaire, herself a distinguished painter, has kindly sent me these lines : "It was to a spot between Villeneuve-la-Lionne and Joisille that Detaille asked to be conducted every morning before dawn by our man, Joyeux, who lighted a great bonfire for him there, in the light of which, according to your touching idea, the first rough sketch of future victory was drawn."

# APPENDIX

## FURTHER DETAILS OF THE GREAT BATTLE

### THE AEROPLANE INCIDENT AT PETITES-LOGES

*Colonel G . . .'s Journal of the Campaign*

*Sept. 2.*—At 8.30 a.m. I received the order preparatory to the operation of Sept. 3. The troops are to be ready by 3 a.m.; the probable itinerary is: Nogent-l'Abbesse, Prunay, Beaumont, Verzy, Villers-Marmery, Condé-sur-Marne. The outposts of the advance-guard battalion of the 68th and 90th (Goureau and Conneau) will have fallen back before daylight to the west of the woods, linking themselves towards Californie with the advance-guards of the XIth army corps: the 68th to lead the march at the head of the brigade.

*Thursday, Sept. 3.*—The departure of the 68th from Nogent-l'Abbesse took place at 3.15 a.m., following the itinerary indicated above; the two battalions previously in the advance-guard now forming the rear-guard. The 68th (Goureau) halted at Villers-Marmery, made a half-wheel, and remained on advance-guard till I relieved it by the 2nd battalion of the 68th (Major Payerne) towards 3.30 a.m., making a redistribution of the troops. The Goureau battalion then entered Villers-Marmery, where it had prepared its canton-

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ments and advance guard ; the 3rd battalion (Major Bardollet) of the 68th was quartered at the southern egress of the village.

While this division was on the march along the Beaumont-Verzy road, a German aeroplane, coming from the south, flew over our troops at a low level while they were halted at the roadside before entering Verzy ; the 68th and neighbouring troops received it with a brisk rifle-fire which pierced it in several places. It fell into a vineyard a short distance away : cavalry and mounted artillerymen, as well as foot soldiers, ran towards the place where it had fallen, on the brow of the hill towards Verzenay and Verzy, about one kilometre north of Verzy. One of the aviators was dead, hit by several bullets, the other, who was unwounded and attempted to escape by running through the vineyards which covered the hill-side, was captured and made prisoner. I afterwards met two men and a non-commissioned officer of the 68th, driving him to the divisional headquarters.

Shortly after three o'clock I received the following order from Trepail, where the 33rd brigade was quartered : " As the march has been carried out without any cause for anxiety on the part of the rearguard, and without the cavalry once sighting the enemy, the general of the division has decided that the troops may go into cantonments in rotation, with the exception of . . . The outposts will be furnished by the 68th infantry at Villers-Marmery, in the sector comprised between the Verzy road (liaison from Verzy with the Morocco division) and the Villers - Marmery



THE BELFRY OF REUVES  
*From a drawing by Emile Genet*



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road (liaison with the XIth army corps at Petites-Loges).”

While I gave these orders to the outposts of the 2nd battalion of the 68th (Major Payerne), the chief-of-staff of the 17th division, Major Jette, warned me to hold Verzy, unoccupied by the Morocco division, an order to which I at once gave effect.

The 3rd battalion (Major Bardollet) furnished a company to support the artillery brigade (Major Bouderiou) stationed outside the village of Villers-Marmery near the Trepail-Les Petites-Loges road; another company was stationed at the edge of the wood towards Les Petites-Loges (a wood of nearly 500 or 600 metres in extent, from the junction of the Trepail-Villers and Trepail-Les Petites-Loges roads); the two other companies were on guard at the south-eastern approach to the village at Villers.

In order to ensure the liaison with the XIth corps, I sent an order to the commanding officer of the 3rd battalion (Bardollet) to send a section without delay to Les Petites-Loges.

About 6.55 a.m., rifle shots were heard between Les Petites-Loges and the wood mentioned above, where Bardollet's 9th company was stationed; then a more violent fusillade was heard; it was the section sent towards Les Petites-Loges, which, instead of finding troops of the XIth army corps, had encountered a German patrol.

The two companies of the 3rd battalion, in cantonments to the south-east of the village, drew closer to those stationed in the wood: the 1st battalion,



quartered in the centre of the village, had got the alarm, and assembled silently in the fields outside the village, not far from Hill 142 (north of the village).

(There is often a comic side even to serious things. While the remaining two companies of the 3rd battalion defiled along the road to reinforce the company already stationed in the wood, I, with my adjutant and liaison officers, was in a ditch by the road-side. The men as they passed did not see me : it was a night of pitch darkness. Among the ranks I saw a donkey led by a buffoon of a trooper. What was he going to do with the donkey ? I could not imagine. I cried to him from my ditch to let the poor beast go. It was only when I called for the second time that, recognising my voice, he freed the donkey, which proceeded to feed tranquilly by the edge of the road, not far from where I was, nor from our horses, which were hidden behind the slope of a little cross-road. Every time that our horses moved and we kept the more rigid silence in order not to divulge our whereabouts, this wretched donkey began to bray with all his might. What between my rage and my laughter, and the laughter of the soldiers, one might have said that this sorry beast was in connivance with the enemy to signal every one of our movements. Finally, provoked beyond endurance, we were obliged to drive him off with blows from the side of a bayonet, of which he at last seemed to be sensible.)

The section of the 9th company, sent towards Les Petites-Loges, had fallen back on the wood, of which the borders were strongly held with the support of

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two other companies ; it had brought back two Saxon prisoners.

Towards 11.20 everything was again quiet.

But at 11.45 a lively fusillade was heard from the direction of the 9th company in the wood, a fusillade which seemed gradually to extend right into the village. The 9th company had a few slight casualties at this time, one of them being Lieutenant Foujanet, who was in command. The firing stopped suddenly : in revenge, two solitary shells were fired by the enemy on the southern extremity of the village, but without result : the shells exploded beyond the last houses.

After that, nothing more happened for the rest of the night.

*Sept. 4.*—At 1.10 a.m. I received orders from brigade headquarters to fall back from 2.15 on Trepail, Condé-sur-Marne, and beyond.

### VERT-LA-GRAVELLE DURING THE INVASION

*Extract made by G. Voillereau from the " Archives Cantonales " of Vertus*

On Friday, Sept. 4, the 10th chasseurs were quartered at Vert-la-Gravelle. During the whole of Friday night there was a pathetic exodus of emigrants, which caused a panic to spread all through the district. They were fleeing from the German hordes which were advancing by forced marches : rumours of their deeds and acts were rife, and were all calculated to cause

alarm. There was certainly some truth in them, but when imagination once steps in, where will it stop ?

On Saturday, the 5th, the inhabitants of Vert also decided to take refuge in flight, so much so that by one o'clock in the afternoon there were only about thirty people left in the village including some emigrants, who had decided not to pursue their melancholy pilgrimage any further.

The chasseurs were still here, and a company of infantry was posted outside the village on the cross-road from Loisy-en-Brie. Only a few stray rifle shots were heard from time to time. The Boches were already at Loisy, where they were supplying themselves with food at the expense of the inhabitants.

Towards four o'clock a German patrol of Death's Head Hussars arrived. In a few minutes they had overrun the chief street, but on a whistle from their lieutenant they turned round and set out on their return along the Vertus road. Some French soldiers, hidden in the ditches near the Gravelle, stopped the patrol at the crossing of that stream and killed two Germans ; on seeing which the German officer, addressing some of the natives of Vert, said to them in good French, "Sirs, do not be alarmed, you can stay here ; we make war against soldiers, not against civilians. . . ." But we could not help seeing that the farm of Petit-Etréchy was already on fire.

At seven o'clock in the evening the German batteries emplaced behind the Charmont wood threw several shells on Pierre-Morains and Coligny. These incendiary shells set the two villages on fire ; there

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were twenty houses burning in Pierre-Morains and three or four in Coligny.

Towards eight o'clock a company of the 135th infantry of Angers arrived by the Toulon road and charged in silence on the Gravelle, where an advanced German battery was emplaced. Thanks to the darkness of the night, the Germans, surprised, could only fire a few shots, and the gun fell into the hands of our men. The German officer and his men were killed. They were buried by their comrades in the deep waters of the Gravelle. In this first attack many French soldiers were left dead on the battle-field.

In the meantime the rest of the 135th arrived at Vert; they remained there for the night, keeping a keen look-out. On that night, Sept. 5, hardly any one closed an eye. This was certainly war at last; the Boches were here. . . . On the morning of the 6th, the 135th took up their position to the north and east of Vert. Towards 8.30 the attack commenced through the village, and the bombardment was continuous till three o'clock in the afternoon. The natives were obliged to take refuge in their cellars. In the meantime, a German patrol of about a dozen men searched the houses. Towards three o'clock an incendiary bomb set the house of M. Lesaint on fire. The flames spread rapidly to the next house, belonging to a M. Thomas. As for the Café Thomas, the houses of Poirer-Ploix and Ploix-Basson, it seemed they had been set on fire by the German patrol. All this time serried masses of German infantry were descending by the woods from Toulon and Charmont; the 135th

French infantry had been obliged to beat a retreat, leaving many dead behind it.

At five o'clock a German artillery regiment, the 1st artillery regiment of the Guard, arrived at Vert and occupied, among others, the houses situated on the Vertus-Sézanne road. From that time we were able to come out of our cellars and walk more freely about the village. The artillery batteries, being installed to the south and west of Vert, fired without ceasing on Mont-Août, Broussy-le-Grand, and Reuves, thinking the French troops were there. Towards 7.30 the regiment left at the gallop in the direction of Coizard and we saw it no more.

On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, German troops patrolled our streets without ceasing, but seemed not to disturb the few remaining inhabitants. The death of a brave farm-labourer has to be deplored—Désiré Massonat, who was “knocked on the head by a bottle and pierced in the chest by a lance,” according to the *Livre Rouge*. Ever since Monday, French soldiers, wounded in the fir-woods, had been coming in to the village; they were hospitably received, and their wounds were dressed . . . the German patrols did them no harm.

On Wednesday the 9th, at 3 p.m. the German troops, in retreating, passed through the village in good order, in deep silence and at great speed. One heard nothing but the voices of the officers, hurling insults at their men, a thing unheard of in the French Army: it is unnecessary to reproduce them here. The troops continued to pass through the village till 2 a.m.

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On Thursday the 10th, some belated German soldiers were still here ; they were calmly preparing their dinner of roast chickens at the Café Charlot, when some French cuirassiers appeared. Hearing the horses' hoofs and seeing the drawn swords of these men, the Germans hid themselves behind the doors and windows and fired on them. This skirmish only lasted a few minutes : two French soldiers were wounded, but not seriously. The whole regiment soon followed this advance-guard. We were saved !

An infantry regiment arrived also ; it scoured the country and the neighbouring marshes, and took a dozen Boches prisoner, the same who had fired on our cuirassiers. In the evening a division of infantry from Rennes was quartered in the village. We were now more than ever at ease in our minds, and that night we were able to sleep peacefully in our beds.

Some of the emigrants returned next morning and the rest on the following days, and we went out to look for the dead. About forty were found on the territory of Vert, not counting the Germans.

### THE BATTERY OF THE CASTLE OF VERT

An eyewitness gives the following account in the *Libre Parole* of April 15, 1917, of a feat of arms performed by Captain Sanceret :

“ On the 5th September, 1914, the 135th infantry regiment left Aulnizeux. The 3rd battalion, as an advance-guard, proceeded towards Vert-la-Gravelle.

Two officers of the chasseurs came to inform Major Noblet that there was a German artillery battery a short distance away which seemed to be lightly guarded. The 12th company under Captain Sanceret being in the vanguard, Major Noblet ordered it to follow one of these aforementioned officers. Captain Sanceret obeyed without knowing to what objective he was bound. He thought at first he had to deal with a section of kneeling foot-soldiers who were hiding behind a hedge. And at 80 metres he gave the order: 'Fix bayonets without loading rifles.' At the first step forward, a fusillade met the little troop, which was not, however, stopped in its advance. But it was soon apparent that it was confronted by artillerymen, who were firing their carbines from behind the shelter of their guns. It was, in fact, a battery with ammunition waggons and unsaddled horses. Captain Sanceret accounted for the enemy soldiers and their horses, while Lieutenant Durieux and his men were engaged with the German officers, who insulted them and fired on them from the windows of the Castle of Vert-la-Gravelle, defended, if I remember rightly, by a drawbridge and a deep moat.

"But the 11th company of the 153th, on hearing the fusillade, thought it a German offensive, and, owing to this error, opened a violent fire upon the 12th company. Captain Sanceret with all his men, caught between two fires, had to traverse the ditches of Vert-la-Gravelle, in order by an oblique path to put himself in contact with the reserve (9th and 10th companies) and then to return and attempt the capture of these German guns. In passing through the village he met Colonel Eon and

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his staff, and gave an account of his adventurous expedition. Colonel Eon then sent a whole battalion to bring back the guns. But it was too late. In the interval the Uhlans had hurried up with their teams, and had carried off the guns and ammunition.

“As a result of this fine feat of arms, which was probably the first direct contact of the French infantry with German artillery, Major Noblet recommended Captain Sanceret for promotion to the command of a battalion. His recommendation was in the following terms: ‘Under a violent point-blank fire, he captured a German battery at the Castle of Vert-la-Gravelle.’

“CORPORAL XXX.”

### MAJOR LIMAL AND CAPTAIN DE NANTEUIL AT COIZARD

#### *Lieutenant B . . .'s Journal of the Campaign*

Our 3rd battalion of the 77th infantry commanded by Major Limal was ordered on Sept. 6 to proceed to the north-west of the village of Bannes, facing Coizard-Joches, and to occupy the salient formed there. A violent cannonade was going on, and the crackling of the machine-guns could be heard even from where we were. The enemy line seemed, according to information which the major had received, not to have reached Toulon - la - Montagne. Many wounded (zouaves, tirailleurs, artillerymen, and foot-soldiers) streamed back towards Bannes, bearing witness to the stiff nature of the struggle. The artillery, contrary to the



two preceding days, went up further to the north, and entered powerfully into the engagement.

The morning passed in the feverish hope that we might come into action.

Towards eleven o'clock the commander of the 12th company received an order to take his company forward in the direction of Coizard, to the south-western boundary of the wood which crowned Mont-Toulon.

This movement was subjected, from its very outset, to an infernal bombardment. At the start, Lieutenant Moreau and about a dozen men at the head of the 1st section which he commanded were wounded.

The advance was made across the marshes under extremely difficult conditions; the water rose sometimes as high as the men's waists. But the battalion succeeded in making this difficult crossing, and continued on its way towards the objective assigned to it. The 12th company had as its particular objective the south-western boundary of the Toulon wood; the three other companies divided among them, to the left, the Coizard-Joches district. From that time the enemy artillery, established towards Vert-la-Gravelle to the north-east, and the enclosure round the priory to the north-west, centred its fire with particular intensity on the front which we occupied. Arrived at the path which, following the southern slopes of Mont-Toulon, goes by Coizard to Vert-la-Gravelle, the company, exposed to the infantry fire of the enemy, and above all to the shrapnel which swept the slopes to the right and left, was obliged to scatter.

Some minutes later Captain de la Barre de Nanteuil

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was seriously wounded in the left arm ; he continued, nevertheless, to command his company. It arrived soon afterwards at its objective and entered into action. At this moment, Captain de Nanteuil, who had lost his horse on August 27 near Lonny, who had suffered for the last few days from enteric fever, and who was weakened by a wound he had just received, gave over the command of his company to Sergeant Buchmann. Major Limal had accompanied the 12th company since it had left the marshes, and was with Captain de Nanteuil when the latter, at the end of his resources, was obliged to hand over the command of his company.

All this time the three other companies, arrested by small bodies of enemy forces established before Courjeonnet, had not been able to advance further than Coizard.

The command of the 1st section of the 12th company was given to Sergeant Pasquier ; that of the 2nd to Sergeant-Major Quais.

It was necessary to ensure the protection and safety of the position attained. Advance-guards signalled that important enemy forces were marching south through the woods. The company having in the course of its advance wiped out the snipers of the enemy infantry established in that part of the wood of Toulon which projects to the south-east, it was necessary to cover the right of the company, now more directly menaced. The bombardment directed on the southern boundary of the wood redoubled in violence.

The units of the battalion engaged on the borders

of the wood north of Coizard did not seem able to continue their advance. The enemy forces advancing through the wood facing the 12th company drew nearer, throwing back the outposts who signalled that important forces were advancing and threatened to outflank the left of the company. Dispositions were being made to resist as long as possible on this position, and to parry these outflanking manœuvres, when Colonel Lestoquoi ordered the 12th company to fall back immediately on Mont-Août, and to the south on Broussy-le-Grand. The order was communicated to the leader of the section, and the movement, which was to be carried out by platoons, was begun by the 4th platoon. The commander of the company went to Captain de Nanteuil to inform him of the order, and to ask him to follow the company in its retreat. But he refused, under pretext that he would be a hindrance to the execution of the movement. The commander did his best to persuade him, proposing to leave some men at his disposal, but the captain persisted in his fine sacrifice, which won our respectful admiration, and which was to be afterwards rewarded, when a few days later the hospital in which he was lying was captured by our advance troops, and he was rescued from the hands of the Germans.

The movement begun by the 4th section, soon followed by that of the 3rd, was greeted by a redoubled bombardment, and a violent fusillade from the enemy units which occupied the south-eastern extremity of the Toulon wood. Why did the 2nd section not follow in its turn? Sergeant Perry, who, with some men of

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the 1st platoon and of the 7th squad, succeeded in rejoining the 2nd section, can give no precise information on this point. And so it came to pass that about twenty-four men fell into the hands of the enemy.

That part of the company which had succeeded in disengaging itself without serious losses in spite of the heavy fire to which it was exposed, eventually regained the marshes, whence it tried to reach Broussy-le-Grand and Mont-Août with the rest of the regiment. This movement was effected under violent artillery fire, which followed the regiment as far as Broussy-le-Grand. The march was very laborious. The men were worn out with their efforts, the crossing and re-crossing of the marshes was accomplished under difficult conditions, and the pursuing fire of the enemy artillery did not give a moment's respite. Major Limal, who had reached the southern extremity of Mont-Toulon, was dangerously wounded during this retreating movement.

At the southern debouch from the Marshes of Saint-Gond, Sergeant Humeau, who had been obliged to take command of the 4th platoon, had been charged with collecting the laggards. He was detained beside a man wounded by the explosion of a shell, and, while dressing his wound and urging him to accept such help as would enable him to rejoin the company, Humeau himself was seriously wounded in the chest and left arm by the explosion of another shell. Incapacitated by his wounds, Humeau told the men who were with him to abandon him. Before their departure he asked them to take with them some papers and

other things from his pockets, as well as a sum of 160 francs in gold, which he asked them to hand to the commanding officer of the company to be distributed to necessitous soldiers, thus giving a fine example of generosity and nobility of character, and showing the fine military qualities with which he was imbued. His conduct was mentioned along with that of Captain de Nanteuil in the colonel's report of the day's operations.

The regiment bivouacked in the neighbourhood of Mont-Août, and arrived at 7 p.m. near the Castle of Montgivroux.

ACCOUNTS OF THE GERMAN OCCUPATION BY SOME INHABITANTS OF SOMMESOUS WHO REMAINED IN THE VILLAGE

M. Hector Auguste (aged fifty-six years) wrote :

“ The Germans entered Sommesous in the early morning of Sept. 8. Several houses were already on fire. To the fires caused by the bombardment they added others, with the help of grenades no doubt, since they were seen to break the windows with their rifle-butts and throw something inside. I can speak from experience, as my own bed was set on fire by this means.

“ I stayed in my house with my wife and two children of the congregation, who were in my charge ; we remained for the most part in the cellar, only going upstairs to boil some potatoes, the only food we had,

and to cast a rapid glance into the street while hiding behind the window curtains.

"On the first day some Boches came down to the cellar, revolver in hand, to ask if there were any men in the house. My wife answered them, for I was hidden behind a big barrel. They did not discover me. They emptied a small barrel of wine, and forced my wife to go upstairs while they rummaged through the furniture and carried off anything they fancied.

"On the second day a superior officer or general, accompanied by another Boche, came to the house. The Boche acted as interpreter, for he spoke perfect French, and asked if he could come back and shelter in my house for the night, should the weather be bad. The second of these visitors declared that it was France who had declared war on Germany, that France would be annihilated, that three army corps were already before the gates of Paris; finally, that the clergy were much to be blamed for the war. We had no way of finding out what was going on in the village except from the noise of the fusillade and the bombardment, the passing and repassing of infantry, who, leaving as a small body in the morning, were at least 10,000 by the end of the day. (It is a strange coincidence and resemblance that the animals also leave the farms to wander through the meadows by day, returning at night to the outskirts of the village.) The Saxons left Sommesous on the morning of the 11th with all speed. Our troops came into the village at once. We were delivered."

M. Ernest Boude, a country policeman, aged seventy-two years, reports :

" On Sept. 7, 1914, towards 4 p.m., the German fire, which since the previous day had passed over Sommesous, seemed to be concentrated on the village. In order to ascertain what was going on on the outskirts, I left my house and went towards the Chalons high road. Arrived near the last house of the village, and standing under a tree, I was suddenly conscious of a pain in my right foot. A piece of shrapnel from a shell which had exploded not far from me, in glancing off one of the branches of the tree, had hit me in a ricochet. I found the bit of shrapnel in my boot, and I was obliged to return home.

" On the 8th the bombardment of the village recommenced about 4 a.m., and numerous fires broke out.

" Then a lively action took place to the south-east of the village on the road to Maily ; it resulted to the advantage of the Germans, who at once proceeded to occupy Sommesous. I saw them breaking the windows with their rifle-butts, and throwing in bags of some special powder of an incendiary nature.

" Although I was wounded in the foot, I escaped with many others to Dommartin-Létrée (north-east of Sommesous). We crossed the German lines without difficulty. Only once a group of officers, seated on the side of the road, asked us where we were going.

" There were at least 200 motor buses stationed on the Vitry-le-François road, being loaded up with







LABEL FOUND IN THE TRENCH OF PRINCE EITEL.

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furniture ; on our return to Sommesous on the 12th, every house was pillaged. Nothing remained but the debris these savages had left behind them."

M. Paul Gervais (aged forty-eight years) writes :

" Towards 2 p.m. on Sept. 7, 1914, Sommesous received its first incendiary shells. The village was occupied by a company of cyclist chasseurs of the 25th battalion (at least, our quarter of the village, the north-west). Many fires broke out in the *rue de l'Église*, the northern side of the village. The bombardment continued till late at night. Towards four o'clock on the 8th the Germans entered the village to the sound of music, coming in from Haussimont by the *rue de l'Église*. They had doubtless met our troops, for a lively fusillade was heard, and continued till eight o'clock. Cries of terror echoed through the streets. Our neighbours, who came in beside us, said that the Prussians had come into their house and had demanded water to drink, but had forced them to drink first. We prudently went down to our cellar.

" Towards nine o'clock we noticed from the window that our chasseurs were falling back fighting. An hour later German artillery took up its position beside the station. Then, after two hours' cannonade, silence descended on the village.

" Towards four o'clock in the afternoon, two young Germans presented themselves, and asked my mother in fluent French, ' Why in all the world did France declare war on Germany ? ' My mother answered them that they were mistaken. They added, ' You

killed Jaurès ; he did not want war. To-morrow we will be in Paris, where the revolution is raging.' My mother replied to this, ' There is no revolution, and you will never get into Paris : I am only an old woman, and you can do to me what you will, but nothing will prevent me from telling you that your Emperor has deceived you.' They then went off without asking any further questions. It was asserted that one of them was taken prisoner two days later in a barn in the village. The rest of the day was uneventful.

" On the 9th some German orderlies came to get milk for their wounded. Some were leading cows they had found wandering in the meadows. Towards the evening a squadron of light horse passed at the gallop in the direction of Haussimont. About nine o'clock the railway line was blown up.

" One is right in supposing that on the 9th the Germans burned their dead, because we were able from our windows to distinguish them carrying large grey bundles into a neighbouring barn. Then the barn was seen to take fire at its four corners, and a strong smell of burning flesh was spread abroad.

" Towards nine o'clock on the 10th, during an intense cannonade, we noticed German cavalry galloping across the fields towards the Chalons road. About 6 p.m. shells from our 75 mm. guns passed above Sommesous to explode on that road. I knew enough German to recognise the following words shouted by the Prussians : ' The army is to go to Chalons.' At 10 p.m. there was absolute calm, so that we could allow ourselves to go to bed, keeping watch in turn.

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“ From dawn on the 11th, our own troops came into the village. We had already walked abroad over the countryside, three-quarters destroyed and devastated ; we were able to save two houses and two barns which were in danger. Many unfurnished houses, which had escaped the bombardment and the fire, were filled with wounded Germans.”

The widow Hattat, eighty-five years of age, reports :

“ My age prevented me from leaving the house of Mme. Guillard, my neighbour, with whom I lived in her cellar during the occupation and the bombardment. The latter commenced at seven o'clock and set the whole quarter of the village round the church on fire, as well as two neighbouring houses belonging to me. The spectacle was terrifying. Towards four o'clock on the 8th, there was an uproar on the Vitry-le-François road. It was the Germans entering the village ; at the same moment our troops began to fire, and battle was joined with fixed bayonets. It was terrible to hear the shouts of the combatants. The French definitely evacuated the village, and the Boches at once commenced to pillage and rob. They were Saxon troops, and they did me no harm and only asked for milk and eggs. They made me drink before them and eat before they tasted food, and they called me Grandmother.

“ Shortly before the battle, the French had driven out the cattle ; it was sad to see these poor beasts wandering about, and still more sad to see a great number of them killed or wounded. We had an ox wounded by a bursting shell ; it returned to die at the entrance

to its old home. Many cows were wounded, and the bodies of thirty-two sheep were found near by.

“ On the morning of the 11th, after a violent bombardment, French soldiers burst into the court and asked us if we had received any hurt. Happily we were all safe and now we were finally delivered.”

Of other inhabitants who remained in Sommesous during the occupation, some have since died, and others, because their memory is feeble from their advanced years, or because they were hidden in their cellars, have nothing further to add to what is recorded above.

Counting the children, twenty-one natives had remained in the village.

#### EXTRACT FROM THE DIARY OF A GERMAN OFFICER

“ . . . We crossed the Marne on Sept. 6.

“ The XXth corps on our left marched straight on Chalons. On our right the Guards were heavily engaged. When we reached Villeneuve, we learned that the Guards had repulsed the enemy; our division is to pursue him. We were in the wood which the enemy was searching by shell fire. Bullets rained on every side, but that which is destined for me was not among them. We could not advance any further, the enemy was too strong for us. On our left, the XIXth corps arrived in time to give us a breathing space. There was a terrible tornado of shell fire. We suffered from overpowering thirst: a glass of Pilsener would have been welcome.

“ Suddenly a shell fell in the wood and killed six of my section : a second fell right in the midst of us : it was impossible to resist any longer ; we retreated.

“ We tried many times to reach the village of Lenharrée, but the enemy artillery swept the wood so that it was impossible for us to push on. And we could not discover the positions of the enemy’s guns. We were well aware of the explanation of the astonishing precision of the enemy’s fire ; we were now in one of his usual fields of fire. Lenharrée was the chief base on the right wing. The general situation was as follows : the Guards were fighting on ground which the enemy knew as well as the palm of his hand, and were therefore in a very critical position. It was similar to the situation at Saint-Privat only that now we were all in the wood, under a terrible fire. Our artillery could do nothing, for it could see nothing. We found an order of General Joffre’s to the commanding officer of the XIth French corps, telling him that he was now playing his last card. It was also probably his best ! As we came to know afterwards, the artillery opposing us had an immense reserve of ammunition. . . . Absolutely exhausted, we waited for nightfall. In front of us everything was quiet.

“ *Sept. 8.*—We advanced again against an enemy hidden in trenches dug in ideal positions. In spite of his artillery fire, which nothing could reduce to silence, we attempted yet again to cross the wood. As soon as we reached the northern boundary, a terrible fire opened on us ; artillery and infantry fire doubled in intensity. A magnificent spectacle was stretched in front of us : far

away on the horizon, Lenharrée was in flames, and we saw the enemy in retreat, beaten at last. He fell back from one wood to another, bombarding us furiously, and scattering us with his machine-guns. Finally we reached the village, but we were driven out of it with great loss.

" The 178th regiment alone had 1700 men wounded, in addition to its dead. Its officers were practically wiped out.

" One more word on the subject of the artillery battle from the French side. There were telephone wires laid everywhere, and it was thought that French officers, hidden in the trees, telephoned our exact position in the wood.

" *Sept. 9.*—The enemy was apparently two kilometres in advance of us. Our artillery arrived an hour too late, unfortunately. The French were indefatigable in digging trenches. We crossed a wood and lost contact altogether. We saw the companies retiring, and we ourselves received an order to beat a retreat. We passed across Lenharrée again, where we found piles of dead bodies, and we went into cantonments at Germinon. A rumour spread abroad that the 1st Army Corps had had a disastrous encounter. The engineers prepared to blow up the bridges. We passed through Chalons-sur-Marne with all haste. I was terribly depressed! Every one seemed to think the position critical. The uncertainty is worse than anything. I think we have advanced too fast, and that we will be worn out by these forced marches and incessant fighting. So much so that we will have to wait for reinforcements. We are

going to Mourmelon-le-Petit, where we are to be put in deep trenches. Four of our aviators, it is said, have been brought down by the enemy."

#### THE PLUNDERING OF THE CASTLE OF BAYE

The question of the pillage of the Castle of Baye is contested, naturally, by Germany. The members of the French commission charged with conducting the inquiry have written as follows :

" We proceeded to the Castle of Baye, and found in that building proofs of the pillage to which it had been subjected.

" On the first floor, a door and four windows have been broken. Art treasures and gold medals have been taken away. The room of the Baron of Baye was in the greatest disorder : numerous articles were strewn on the floor ; the drawers were open and in a state of disorder. The front of a bureau was broken, a Louis XVI. chest and a round-topped bureau of the same period had been ransacked. This room must have been occupied by a personage of high rank, for the following chalk inscription was found on the door : *I. K. Hoheit*. No one was able to give us any information as to the identity of this *Highness* : but a general, who lodged with M. Houllier, the municipal councillor, said to his host that the castle had sheltered the Duke of Brunswick and the staff of the Xth Corps."

In support of this opinion, M. Georges Montorgueil, a journalist of high ability and recognised honesty



whose judgments are models of precision, published the following information in the *Éclair*; it forms decisive confirmation of the hypotheses of the official commission: "The name of the Duke of Brunswick's orderly officer, Colonel Sknigge, was found written in chalk (in German) on one of the doors of the castle near the room of M. de Baye, which was occupied by William II.'s son-in-law.

"All the officers of the Xth corps (Hanoverians) are represented in these inscriptions on the doors:

*Chief-of-Staff Count Lamsdorf. Staff-Officers: Captain Krall, Captain Siulpnagel, Major von Beig, Colonel von Winterfeld, etc.*

"Prince Eitel was there too: the proof is given in the name of his orderly-officer, *Major von Amsberg*.

"Regarding the inscription, *I. K. Hoheit*, of which the report speaks, two names were written above that inscription: they had afterwards been rubbed out, but could still be easily read: first *Braunschweig*; then below it, *Eitel-Friedrich*.

"A touching family reunion truly, and a touching unanimity of purpose no doubt, to empty the castle of which these princes of German blood were the guests, and which for that reason should have been sacred from their hands!"

Personal information allows us to add that, "in the so-called Louis XVI. room, where the Count of Bothmer was lodged (*Oberst*), Mme. la Baronne de Baye found a box addressed to that officer in these words: *Orderly-Officer of the General commanding the Xth Army Corps*; and on the back of the box: *Sent*

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*by Erika, Countess of Bothmer, Strasse . . . Berlin ;* the Bothmer coat-of-arms was still intact on the seal. . . . The bureau of the room occupied and pillaged by the Duke of Brunswick had contained between 15,000 and 18,000 francs as well as jewels, watches, etc. This bureau was broken to pieces. All the furniture in all the rooms had been forced open ; collections of fans, miniatures, laces had been stolen. The cellar had been completely emptied. The dining-hall alone was respected, doubtless because the German princes had their meals there ; but all the china, including an antique and beautiful service of glass, was broken after it had been used. The Germans stayed five days at Baye. Before the enemy occupation, a hospital had been installed, by order of the baroness, on the ground floor of the castle. It was evacuated by the Germans who filled it with their own wounded. These villains pushed their cynicism to the extent of taking away the veil used to cover the faces of the dead of that ancient family, a lace veil of great value. By good fortune part of the celebrated collection which had come out of the prehistoric grottos discovered and excavated by M. de Baye in this region, as well as his Gallic and Gallo-Roman collections, had been taken away to the Museum at Saint-Germain, where they are lodged in two rooms bearing the name of the generous and learned donor."

In the face of these proofs, of what value is the German official report ? The impartiality of the historian makes it incumbent on us to publish this report, which comes from the German Embassy at Madrid,

but which was probably circulated through all the chancelleries of Europe :

“ The four members of the French commission affirm that they found in the Castle of Baye ‘ traces of the pillage to which it had been subjected ’ ; they say that doors and windows had been forced open, that valuable things of Russian origin, as well as several gold medals, had been taken away ; that tables, chests of drawers, cupboards had been searched and their contents strewn over the floor. It has been suspected that the Duke of Brunswick and the Staff of the Xth army corps were guilty of this robbery.

“ The investigations commenced by the German government have led to the following results :

“ A. Our troops entered the Castle of Baye on Sept. 5, 1914. The military situation was such that it was impossible for our troops to occupy the castle before that date.

“ B. Before the arrival of our troops the French had abandoned the castle with all haste, as is proved by French letters which have been found, and by a French ‘ Order of the Day.’ This fact has also been confirmed by the *concierge* of the castle.

“ C. When our troops entered the castle they found it in a state of extreme disorder and dirt. Cupboards were open, their locks forced, their contents strewn on the ground. The beds were in disorder. Everything was dirty and untidy. In the museum everything on the surface appeared to be intact ; only the glass of one or two cases was broken, and the pieces had fallen inside. In one of these cases there were

views of the castle, of which one or two seemed to have disappeared. All this was confirmed immediately after the entry of our troops.

“ D. During the night of Sept. 9 our troops abandoned the castle : it remained (after all possible cleaning had been done, and any furniture which had been moved restored to its proper place) in the same state in which it had been found on Sept. 5. The following morning it was reoccupied by the French and transformed into a hospital.

“ E. The *concierge* of the castle, to whom the German officers on their arrival had spoken of the state in which they had found the interior, declared that the Germans were not responsible, and added, ‘ French officers were responsible for all that.’

“ F. After the departure of the German troops, not one of the inmates of the castle complained of the conduct of the Germans. Moreover, four gentlemen, one of whom was said to be the proprietor of the castle, after having carefully examined the building, said not a single word referring to pillage or other devastations, and they left the castle quite calmly.”

To show the value of this report, it suffices to observe that before the arrival of the German troops—not after their departure—the ground floor of the castle alone was occupied as a French hospital ; that all the other rooms were locked up and under the care of the guardians of the castle, who affirmed that up to that time there was no disorder, that no robbery had taken place, that the *concierge* of the castle energetically denied having made the statement attributed to her by

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the German report ; finally, that Baron de Baye, the proprietor of the castle, was in Russia from the beginning of July, 1914, the Czar, Nicholas II., having asked him to do the honours of the "Museum of 1812," formed by his efforts, to M. Poincaré. The President of the Republic returned to France before the declaration of war, but at the date on which we write Baron de Baye has not yet left Russia. As for the Baroness, since the outbreak of war she and her daughter have been serving as nurses at the hospital instituted in the Grand Hotel at Biarritz. And so the whole allegations of the German report are refuted.

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION INSTITUTED WITH A VIEW TO OBTAINING PROOF OF ACTS COMMITTED BY THE ENEMY, VIOLATING THE *Droit des Gens* (DECEMBER 17, 1914)

### *Marne district*

In the department of the Marne, as elsewhere, German troops were guilty of general pillage and robbery, effected always under the same conditions, that is, with the complicity of their officers. In this way the communes of Heiltz-le-Maurupt, Suippes, Marfaux, Fromentières, and Esternay suffered especially. All that the invader took from the houses was loaded on motor lorries, on carriages, or carts. At Suippes in particular he carried away a great quantity of diverse objects, among others sewing-machines and toys.

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Many villages and small towns were set on fire without any military reason. And it cannot be doubted that these crimes were committed by order; the detachments arrived in the villages with their torches and grenades as well as their usual weapons.

At Lépine, a farmer called Caquet, who had two cyclists lodging with him, asked them if the grenades with which he saw them provided were destined for his house. "No," they replied, "we are finished with Lépine." By that time nine houses in the village were already burnt to the ground.

At Marfaux nineteen houses fell a prey to the flames.

At Gault-la-Forêt seven or eight houses were destroyed. The commune of Glannes no longer exists, or it would tell the same tale. At Somme-Tourbe the whole village was burned down, with the exception of the *Mairie*, the church, and two private houses.

At Auve nearly the whole town was wiped out. At Etrepy sixty-three households out of seventy were without shelter. At Huiron all the houses, with the exception of five, were set on fire. At Sermaize-les-Bains only about forty houses were left out of 900. At Bignicourt-sur-Saulx thirty houses out of thirty-three were reduced to ruins.

In the large town of Suippes, of which a great part was burned down, soldiers were seen walking along the streets carrying straw and cans of petrol. While the mayor's house was in flames, six sentinels with fixed bayonets were posted to prevent any one entering in order to save it.

All these incendiary fires—which only represent a

small part of the dreadful total of such deeds of which the Marne district was the scene—were set alight without the inhabitants of these places—now almost completely destroyed—showing the least sign of rebellion, the slightest resistance. In some villages the Germans, before setting them on fire, caused a shot to be fired by one of their soldiers in order to be able to pretend afterwards that the civil population had attacked them, a pretext the more absurd that by the time the enemy arrived there was no one left in the villages except old people or invalids totally incapable of any form of aggression.

Numerous attempts were also made against the lives of the inhabitants. Hostages were taken away from most of the communes; many of them never returned. At Sermaize-les-Bains, where the Germans took away about fifty hostages, some of them were dressed up in helmets and military coats, and in these accoutrements made to mount guard over the bridges.

At Bignicourt-sur-Saulx thirty men and forty-five women and children were forced to go away with a German detachment. One of the men, Émile Pierre, has not returned; nothing has been heard of him. At Corfélix the Sieur Jacquet, who was taken away on Sept. 7, with eleven of his fellow-citizens, was found about 500 metres from the village, a bullet through his head.

At Sompuis the curé, his servant, and four other inmates, taken on the same day as hostages from Corfélix, had not returned at the time of our inquiry.

In the same district an old man of seventy years of

age, called Jacquemin, was fastened down to his bed by an officer and left in that state, without food, for three days. He died soon afterwards.

At Vert-la-Gravelle a young farm-labourer was killed. He was knocked on the head by a bottle, and his chest was pierced by a lance. At Champguyon, a commune which was set on fire, a man called Verdier was killed in the house of his father-in-law. The latter was not present at the execution, but he heard a shot, and the next day an officer said to him : " Your son has been shot. He is under the debris." But in spite of the search which was made, the body was not found. It must have been burned.

At Sermaize a road-mender called Brocard was put among the hostages. At the moment when he was arrested along with his son, his wife and daughter-in-law, mad with fear, threw themselves into the Saulx. The old man, contriving to free himself for a moment, ran to them as fast as he could and made several attempts to save them ; but the Germans dragged him pitilessly away, leaving the two unhappy women to drown in the river. When set at liberty at the end of four days, Brocard and his son recovered the bodies ; they affirm that both women had been shot through the head.

At Montmirail a scene of veritable savagery was enacted. On Sept. 5, a non-commissioned officer threw himself . . . on the widow Naudé in whose house he lodged . . . ; her father, François Fontaine, ran to her on hearing her cries. Shortly afterwards fifteen or twenty Germans forced open the door of the



house, pushed the old man into the street and shot him without pity. At that moment, little Juliette Naudé, having opened her window, was struck by a bullet which went right through her body. The poor child died, after twenty-four hours of agony.

On Sept. 6, at Champguyon, a woman called Louvet was present at the martyrdom of her husband. Seeing him in the hands of ten or fifteen soldiers, who had knocked him down with blows from a stick in front of his own house, she ran out and embraced him in the gateway. She was brutally thrown back, while these vile executioners dragged away her unfortunate husband, who was covered with blood. He implored them to spare his life, as he had done nothing to deserve such treatment, but he was put to death at the end of the village. When his wife found him he was horribly disfigured. His skull was battered in, one of his eyes was torn out and one of his wrists broken.

At Esternay on Sept. 6, thirty-five or forty Germans dragged away the Sieur Laurenceau about three o'clock in the afternoon ; he made a sudden movement, as if to free himself, and was at once shot.

(Here follow particulars of the way in which the German soldiers maltreated women and children at Esternay, Vitry-en-Perthois, Suippes, Jussecourt-Minecourt, and so on.)

As the bombardment of an open town incontestably constituted a violation of the *Droit des Gens*, we thought it within our province to make investigations at Reims, which was bombarded by the Germans for



**MONDEMENT**  
*From a drawing by Emile Genet*



twenty-four days. After having received the report of the mayor, by which we saw that about 300 persons of the civil population had been killed, we investigated the destruction of many buildings, and we were able to get some idea of the enormous and irreparable damage inflicted on the cathedral. Since October 7, the date of our visit, the bombardment has continued; the number of victims must have increased considerably. The whole world knows how this unhappy town has suffered, and also that the attitude of its municipality has been above all praise.

In the course of our inquiry at the *Hôtel-de-Ville*, six shells fell in the vicinity of that building. The fifth fell a short distance from the principal façade; the sixth, fifteen or twenty metres from the offices.

On the following day we went to the Castle of Baye, where we found evidences of the pillage to which that building had been subjected.

On the same day we visited the Castle of Beaumont, near Montmirail, belonging to Count Alfred de la Rochefoucauld. According to the gardener's wife, this building was pillaged by the Germans in the absence of its owner, during an occupation which lasted from the 4th to the 6th of September. The invaders left behind them a state of great disorder and indescribable uncleanliness.

Writing-desks, bureaux, and strong-boxes had been broken open; jewel-boxes had been taken out of the drawers and emptied.

It was still possible to make out chalk inscriptions

on the doors of the rooms; among them we noticed the following: *Excellenz, Major von Lebedur, Graf Waldersee.*

G. PAYELLE, *President.*

ARMAND MOLLARD, G. MARINGER.

PAILLOT, *reporter.*

#### THE PRIORY OF SAINT-GOND

The Priory of Saint-Gond or Gaond, two leagues from Sézanne, formerly called Saint-Pierre-en-Oyes, was a beautiful abbey founded by this saint about the year 660. He was a nephew of Vaudregesil, Mayor of the Palace, and was related to King Dagobert I., who brought him up in the same eminent piety which he himself professed. They both left the court in 654, during the reign of Clovis II., and retired to a place called Fontenelle. There they built an abbey, in which they had the consolation of sheltering 300 religious at the same time. That made Vaudregesil resolve—he had already merited the name of Saint—to propose to Saint Gond that he should establish another abbey with some of his followers in a lonely place to which Providence should conduct him. He left Fontenelle about the year 660, five years before the death of his uncle, who passed away in 665. After having lived in several other places, he arrived finally in a district called Oye, which is situated in a beautiful valley, abounding in meadows and springs, covered with woods and encircled by low-lying hills, a veritable solitude. In this place Saint Gond built a church,

which was dedicated to Saint Peter, as well as little cells for himself and those religious who were with him.

Hastingue, a famous warrior who commanded the army of the Normans, was born in a little town of Champagne called Trancaut (in Latin *Tranquilius*); he breathed only fire and blood, and he pillaged and burned this abbey; but in 959, Eve, the sister of Valderic, Archbishop of Rheims, and of Alberon, Bishop of Metz, instituted a search for the body of Saint Gond, which had been hidden in the ground. She had the precious relics put in a shrine, and she rebuilt the monastery, in which she established a number of religious. She consecrated the church in honour of Saint Gond, and she kept it up and cared for it from that time. According to an ancient title of this abbey of the year 1128, Hatton, the fifty-sixth bishop of Troyes, confirmed Ebrand, an abbot, in the possession of all lands belonging to the abbey, and he gave him other lands as well. There are also extant the briefs of several popes, among others one of the year 1200, which show that this abbey was recognised by the sovereign pontiffs.

In the year 1155, Henry, first of the name, Count of Champagne, forbade John, Seigneur of Pleurs, to continue his exactions against the abbot and religious of this abbey, which he put under his own protection, and that of the counts, his successors. This title was given at Vertus in the month of April, 1155. The same count gave lands to the abbey in 1156, 1171, and 1173; but the seigneurs who were the overlords of this abbey seized its principal revenues by force. The abbot, not

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being in a position to compel the restitution of funds by these usurpers, proposed, in order to preserve what little remained to it, to abandon the title of abbot, to be content with that of prior, and to put this priory under the care of the abbey of Montier-la-Celle. This was done in 1342 by the authority of Pope Clement VI. and the ministry of the Bishop of Troyes. Only eight religious were left to celebrate divine office day and night, and to sing High Mass every day. The revenue was about 10,000 livres. It is asserted to this day that though this monastery is situated in the midst of a marsh, no one ever hears more than one frog croaking at a time. That is attributed to the prayers of Saint Gond, who, being sadly interrupted by the noise of the frogs in the marsh, commanded them to keep silence.

Up till a few years ago, there were still five or six monks who sang the divine office ; but they were obliged to content themselves each with a modest pension, to retire where they could, and to abandon the monastery, which is now nothing but a farmer's dwelling, the abbey with its revenues having been merged in the Seminary of Troyes. There is now only one mass celebrated at Saint-Gond on Sundays, and on the feast days of the Church. (Baugier, *Mémoires historiques de la Province de Champagne*, vol ii. MDCCXXI.)

### PRINCE EITEL'S TRENCH

We have received the following letter from Abbé Favret, chaplain of Temporary Hospital No. 20, at Chalons-sur-Marne :—

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" In the course of October 1914, I went out to search for the body of Captain Gauroy of the 90th, who had fallen between Bannes and Fère-Champenoise. In the course of my search, which was on this occasion unfruitful, I noticed, on the border of the road from Broussy-le-Grand to Fère-Champenoise, a trench which seemed to be particularly well dug and cared for, more so even than most of the German trenches. It was about one and a half metres deep (roughly about four and a half feet), and was protected by a parapet fifty centimetres (one and a half feet) high, bevelled on each side ; its direction was south-west.

" All over the neighbouring ground, and particularly in the trench, fragments of post cards, envelopes and telegrams were strewn about. All of these were addressed to Prince Eitel ; some of the envelopes bore the seal of the prince's aide-de-camp. Near this trench I found a little cardboard box which had been fastened with a cord of the German colours, and which was addressed on a label also bearing these colours to

SR. KÖNIGLICHEN HOHEIT  
DEM PRINZEN  
EITEL FRIEDRICH VON PREUSEN  
IM FELDE

The particulars of his address were in pencil, *I. G. Reg.—1st Regiment of the Guard.*" (A reproduction of this document faces p. 160.)

. . . . .



Abbé Gauroy, who accompanied Abbé Favret, gives us some interesting information: "I was with my colleague of the College of Saint-Étienne during his search for the body of one of my brothers, Captain Gauroy, who fell in action on Sept. 8 at the head of the 2nd company of the 90th. In a trench to the south of Bannes on the edge of the road leading from Broussy-le-Grand to Fère-Champenoise, about 150 or 200 metres from the place where we found the grave of my brother, we discovered a little cardboard box, ten by fifteen centimetres. A cord of the German colours which had tied it was still attached to the cover, on which the inscription, forwarded to you by Abbé Favret, was still plainly legible."

The presence of Prince Eitel, if not at Mondement, at least before the marshes of Saint-Gond, is thus clearly proved. And there was nothing to prevent him from going to the castle on the morning of the 9th, when he learned of its fall.

#### CAPTAIN CUTTOLI'S COMPANY AT OYES

##### *Journal of Captain de Sales de Sabales*

At the time when the 77th regiment of the line fell back on Mont-Août, drawing the 2nd tirailleurs along with it, the Lachèze battalion (1st zouaves) still occupied the heights 1500 metres to the south of Oyes (the slopes of Montgivroux), and the 1st company of the battalion, under Captain Cuttoli, was at Oyes.

If the heights commanding Oyes were abandoned,

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the village would become untenable, a veritable death-trap, the marshes on the right barring the way of escape. Forewarned of the movement of the 2nd tirailleurs by Colonel Fellert, this company, after having retired, hurled itself again on the village.

The Germans were already there.

We were facing north.

Three sections were on the left with the captain—the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd (Sergeant Floutier, Sergeant-major Prunet, and Sergeant Cléoles); a half-section of the 4th faced the village, forming a screen (half-section Dubois); the 2nd half-section was posted by the marshes, as well as a section of the 3rd company, which was attached to our movement. I went with this group. On the right we went forward without much delay, crossing the Oyes-Reuves road, which divides the southern part of Oyes into two nearly equal halves. We arrived at a little meadow, cut up by hedges, where we threw ourselves on the German contingents which had filtered in by the marshes. In spite of our losses, our positions were everywhere good, and we were accomplishing good work, when two liaison officers in succession brought me the order to cease fire and to rejoin the three other companies. The few details, confused and fragmentary as they were, added by these liaison officers allowed me to perceive the gravity of the situation.

On the left, Captain Cuttoli with his three sections had also advanced. He reached Oyes and found himself in a field of maize, when a terrible fusillade felled a large part of his men of the 1st and 3rd sections to

the ground. Sergeant Cléoles was wounded. Sergeant-major Prunet's section, which had advanced by the right side of the road, and was already engaged in the village, suffered a no less violent frontal fire from enemy snipers hidden in the houses and gardens.

Dubois' half-section, augmented by men from the 1st and 3rd sections brought along by the captain, had flung itself behind a garden wall which lies to the east of the Villevenard-Oyes road, along the Oyes-Reuves road. There they fought desperately, and made a regular hecatomb of Germans. The position of this little troop, entirely uncovered on the left, was extremely critical; repeated and urgent orders from the captain commanded it to rejoin the other companies of the battalion. Unfortunately, these remnants of the section, holding on there to allow me time to fall back, were cut off on the left by an enemy force constantly increasing in numbers, which, finding no longer any foe in front of it, fell with fury on this mere handful of men. The captain fell, wounded by five bullets. Sergeant Floutier, who commanded the 1st section, and Sergeant Dubois, who commanded the 2nd half of my section, fell also, both shot through the lungs. There were acts of heroism during this affair which deserve to be recorded; zouaves who allowed themselves to be killed in defending the body of their chief; others who by their firm bearing and splendid courage kept their hesitating comrades at their posts, comrades unnerved by the loss of their officers and non-commissioned officers. The sergeant-major, who was killed, was found on the battlefield

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surrounded by a whole squad of his section who had been killed where they stood rather than abandon him. Only two men of this section were left alive. When the captain fell, shot in five places, the zouaves Bonforul, Resclon and Moisset rushed forward under a hail of bullets to rescue him, and succeeded in carrying him some hundred metres before they also fell in their turn. Resclon and Moisset were shot in the chest ; Bonforul's thigh was broken.

With the captain, all the corporals and sergeants round him had fallen. Without even a non-commissioned officer to command them, the men who remained hesitated. But a zouave called Dabonneville, by his proud bearing and resolute attitude, kept them together behind the wall while the body of the captain was being carried away. With the men who remained to me I gained the trenches, now occupied by the 4th, 3rd, and 2nd companies ; then I went back behind the Mondement-Reuves road to find the remnants of the 3rd and 1st sections. I was left the sole officer, with eighty-six men and one sergeant. I at once informed the major of my position, of the serious losses which our company had sustained, and asked him for further orders. I waited there till night fell.

The objective of the Germans in this affair was the Castle of Mondement, a strategical point which they coveted. Disorganised for an instant by the unsuccessful offensive of our company, they yet continued to advance, when they came across an obstacle, more serious this time — three other companies of the battalion with a machine-gun section at their head,

hidden behind the trenches we had dug the day before. The position was strong ; the day was waning. And the Germans, who advanced in deep columns, were to pay dearly for the losses they had inflicted on us. The masses which had advanced on us streamed back in disorder on Oyes. Their offensive was broken. They did not resume it that evening, and at 7 a.m., when Captain Lachèze—who, in spite of the fact that all his ammunition was exhausted, had stuck to his positions—when he fell back on the wood of Allemant no new effort had been made on the part of the enemy.

#### THE 77TH AT MONDEMENT

By *Élie Chamard, Bandsman and Stretcher-bearer of the 77th Infantry Regiment*

. . . On Sept. 7 the regiment, worn out by the fighting at Bannes, was resting near Linthes and Saint-Loup, when the colonel was informed by a staff-officer of the retreat of the Germans on our left. He at once dispatched his adjutant, Captain Béziers-la-Fosse, to spread the good news among the battalions. The men's faces cleared at once, they shouted for joy, they threw up their *képis*. All lassitude had disappeared. And at this moment Lieutenant Burgevin was seen riding forward on his grey mare, leading the re-  
victualling convoy. For five days we had eaten nothing !

Alas ! hardly had the halt commenced when one of General Humbert's staff-officers arrived with the order

to proceed at once to the relief of the zouaves and the tirailleurs. Farewell to feasting !

The regiment climbed up the slopes of Broyes towards 5 p.m. and bivouacked in the Castle of Montgivroux. That night passed peacefully. But at dawn we proceeded to the Signal du Poirier. The brigade remained at the castle. The staff of the 77th was installed in a wooden hut among the vineyards, half-way up the hill. On arriving, Captain Henrion <sup>1</sup> pushed forward an audacious reconnaissance to the villa of Soizy-aux-Bois. Two prisoners were taken, the first of that battle.<sup>2</sup> During this time Colonel Lestoquoi, Captain Béziers-la-Fosse and Second-Lieutenant Boulin had effected a liaison with the tirailleurs and zouaves of the first line. But the enemy sprinkled the headquarters copiously with shells. One shell exploded in the hut and wounded Second-Lieutenant Clairon, the colonel's secretary. The battle raged. One felt the bitter fury of the enemy's assault : he wished at all costs to advance and take the heights which barred the route to Troyes. Rain fell, the sharp rain of a thunderstorm which refreshed the atmosphere. At two o'clock the brigade received orders that the regiment was to return to Saint-Loup to be under the orders of the general commanding the Xth corps. The situation was said to be serious on our right : Mont-Août was turned : Fère-Champenoise was taken. At four o'clock units of the

<sup>1</sup> Captain Henrion was mentioned in the Army Order for his splendid conduct.

<sup>2</sup> This point is contested. On the 5th an Uhlan, one of a patrol which had slipped in between Sommesous and Haussimont, was made prisoner by a detachment of the 1st dragoons.

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77th commenced this movement. The Morocco division thought a general order to retreat had been received : it began to fall back in its turn. At the same moment our adversary, by whom our movements were not unnoticed, redoubled his efforts and attacked without ceasing until one of his brigades debouched on Oyes early in the morning of the 9th, and seized the Castle of Mondement, of which it at once organised the defence in a remarkable way.

The 77th finally freed itself without heavy losses and set out for Saint-Loup. It was five o'clock. Rain began to fall again, a heavy shower which soaked the men to the bone. Restless and full of consternation, they gave up all hope ; especially when, descending from Broys and Allemant, they saw the plain of the Aube in the distance. Many of them said, " If we have to fall back still further, how far will we get, with the enemy's artillery sweeping over that plain ! "

Add to all that the gnawing pain of hunger : yesterday's meal had been very light.

The night was spent at Saint-Loup. The captains of several companies had managed to secure some mutton ; it was divided in the early morning. The sun was shining brightly. The rain had stopped. The moral was excellent. To-day's menu included mutton cutlets. What a feast ! But at 8.45 an express order arrived : the regiment was to proceed with all haste to Mondement, which the enemy was about to occupy.

Consternation reigned ; but it passed quickly, for the spirit of this fine body of troops was admirable. " The situation is grave, very grave, but not hopeless,"

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the men were told. "Hold on until midnight and the battle is won." The men had confidence; we left in good heart, even though we had not had time to cook the mutton, and the huge cauldrons of coffee were not even tasted. The 2nd battalion made straight for Allemant, while the 1st and the 3rd formed themselves into a screen across the fields to Broyes. In this way we gained the wood to the south-east of the castle. The colonel had received various orders from General Humbert; he wished the village and castle of Mondement to be taken. The staff counted on the 77th for this task, which was both difficult and of extreme importance. The situation was far from being bright in this area of the battle; the tirailleurs and the zouaves were terribly cut up; they roamed at large, without leaders, in the wood. A battalion of the 208th also marched forward to the adventure. But the entry of the 77th on the scene was to set everything right.

Colonel Lestoquoi, by his own reconnaissances and those of the battalions (particularly that of the 6th company), judged the enemy's defence to be extremely powerful.<sup>1</sup> The village was strongly held. The walls of

<sup>1</sup> We had the 77th Prussian regiment and the 164th Hanoverians before us. (Note by E. C.) This is confirmed by the shoulder-straps which M. Roland collected in the little museum in the schoolhouse at Villevenard; they belong for the most part to the 77th (white and grey-blue ground), to the 164th (grey-blue), to the 16th (grey-blue), 56th (grey-blue), 74th (grey-blue), 78th (white), 79th (grey-blue) and the regiments of the Guard (a W surmounted by a crown on grey-blue or white, in red or gold letters). "The Germans," said M. Roland, "took off their shoulder-straps before going into action, in order to conceal the numbers of their regiments. Black masks were also found, which were put on in order that at a distance the Germans might be mistaken for our Senegalese troops."



the park were pierced with loop-holes fifty centimetres above the ground ; machine-guns were installed in each corner.

Picked marksmen were posted at every window of the castle, sheltered behind mattresses. In the face of this organisation and under the fire of our own guns, which could not reach the buildings, Colonel Lestoquoi asked that a gun should be carried forward by the men in order that the gunners should have a better target. But his idea seemed impossible to carry out.

At 1.30, General Humbert sent an order to the colonel of the 77th to seize Mondement, to reconnoitre the north-western boundary of the Allemant wood, to attack it if the enemy was there, and to occupy it if it had been abandoned by the zouaves.

The 1st battalion seized the ground to the west of the castle, to the left of the Broyes road. The 3rd battalion (Major de Courson) was posted behind it. The woods protected them sufficiently. The 2nd battalion (Major de Beaufort), which was charged with the attack, was massed near the Broyes road to the south of the castle. Two companies of zouaves developed the movement on the left, supported by the 1st battalion under Major de Merlis.

At 2.30 p.m. the colonel informed Colonel Eon that his attack was ready, and that he only awaited the support of the artillery.

During this time Major de Beaufort sent his liaison officer, Pierre Rabouin,<sup>1</sup> to inform the artillery to

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Rabouin, sergeant of the 77th, cyclist orderly of the colonel, Military Medal, mentioned four times in the order of the day, fell on

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stretch out its fire. Then he gave the order, Fix bayonets ! But before charging, this ardent Catholic felt the need of commending his force to God. He called a soldier priest, Corporal Gallard, a missionary, out of the ranks, and asked him to give absolution to those men who wished to receive it. The battalion fell on its knees at the sign of the Cross. It is difficult to imagine anything more moving than this scene. The companies were massed 500 metres from the castle, which they were about to attack to the south of the kitchen garden, the 5th and 7th companies were on the Broyes road to the left, the 6th and 8th were in the wood to the right. The enemy artillery had appreciably stretched out its fire. The men waited, calm and confident. " One last effort," Colonel Lestoquoi had said to them.

Some of them were even joyful, as, with a curious look on their faces, they touched the points of their bayonets. Already the smell of powder, the game of death had touched them. . . . Major de Beaufort had drawn on his white gloves ; he now took up the little cane he always carried. He took one last proud look over his men, standing armed and motionless ; then, out of a heart beating with great hopes, he cried in a firm voice, " Forward, my lads ! For France ! Charge ! " The battalion leapt forward as if in a single bound, after its chief.

the field of honour at the side of his chief on October 13, 1916. He had the honour of bearing the battalion colours on the Great Place before the Hall at Ypres on the occasion of the decorations in honour of the exploit of Mondement. (Note, E. C.) It is this hero, with the flag of the 2nd battalion, who is represented in the photograph facing p. 192.

It was a charge of deep close masses. The men shouted and sang. The bugles sounded and quickened their call till it became a veritable gymnastic feat. Bullets whistled past. Soldiers fell on every side. Faster ! Faster ! The fusillade was infernal. Our 75's had made a breach in the wall of the garden. Major de Beaufort made straight for it. He stopped for a moment at the foot of a tree to decide on his tactics. " Ah ! one can't see them yet, these Boches," he murmured. A bullet right in the middle of his forehead knocked him down, dead. His men wished to carry away his body. But the best way to avenge him was to advance. Lieutenant Génois gathered them together and led them towards the breach. " Through the breach, my lads ! through the breach ! We will make a good shell ! " he cried. A private called Durand made ready to jump through, when Lieutenant Parpaillon laid his hand on his shoulder : " Stop ! Let me go first."—" Pass on, sir," Durand replied, " I will follow you." Parpaillon was by this time in the breach, his sword in his hand. " Forward ! " he shouted. A bullet struck him in the head, he fell down dead. Captain Secondat de Montesquieu, on his side, had reached the wall, his sword drawn, and attended by Atlé, his sergeant. While trying to climb over, they fell ; both killed by the same bullet. Lieutenant d'Yturbide at once rushed forward, and, in spite of a violent fire, did not hesitate to recover all the precious private possessions from the pockets of his beloved captain. Lieutenant Rochier, wounded in the hand, refused to wait to have it dressed.

" It is nothing," he said, " it is nothing. Forward ! "





THE FANION OF THE 2ND BATTALION OF THE 77TH

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He tied a handkerchief carelessly round it, and went on more eagerly than ever. Sergeant Guyot afterwards rallied the men who had followed this heroic lieutenant, killed in the retreat. Our bugles continued to sound the charge, ever more loudly. Lieutenant Marchand had boldly pushed his machine-guns forward, but he was soon wounded. Lieutenant Floquet was killed, Second-Lieutenant Noël mortally wounded. During this time some of our men had crept along the wall of the enclosure, and, making a short ladder, were firing into the kitchen garden on the grey uniforms. A zouave (the zouaves were attacking by the principal entrance) had succeeded in taking cover behind the gate, and quite coolly, aiming carefully as if at target practice, he picked off his men one by one.

But the order of retreat was now heard. Captain Villers, Lieutenants Génois and d'Yturbide collected the men; it was with sore hearts that they left the body of their commanding officer on the ground, but it would have been madness to attempt to carry it away in full sight of the enemy.

The battalion was re-formed behind the wood. Alas! what blanks! How many were missing! The death of Major de Beaufort made all hearts heavy with despair. Every one had had such confidence in him! His soldiers loved him like a father. And he would certainly have risen to the highest rank. Many of the men wept openly. But here Captain de la Taille arrived from the brigade. "We must charge again," he announced, "after another artillery preparation on the castle."

Well! if it was necessary, we would charge again!

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What spirit there was among these splendid lads of Cholet !

And this charge, not to mention its moral significance, had a positive result. Terrorised—that is the only word for it—by this avalanche of men which advanced in spite of their machine-guns, a good number of Germans ran away to the rear, and were killed in their retreat by the machine-guns of our 1st battalion and those of a section of the 2nd tirailleurs, commanded by Lieutenant Lucas, which was guarding the approaches to the village.

All the same the enemy occupied the position in sufficiently large numbers to be able to offer a prolonged defence. Reconnoitring parties found him everywhere in possession, and most of the patrols returned, having sustained losses. A brave sergeant called Pierron met his death in that way. Three bandsmen of the Cross of Malta and three stretcher-bearers of the Red Cross were dispatched to the north-west of the castle, where it was supposed there were some of our wounded. They had hardly accomplished half of their hazardous journey across open ground when a bugle call of three notes in harmony—what a melancholy call !—was heard, followed by a volley of rifle shots.<sup>1</sup> A bandsman, Albert Ménard, and a stretcher-bearer, René Bertron, were hit successively, the one in the arm, the other in the leg. It was decidedly necessary to use the guns. Colonel Lestoquoi ordered up one of the big guns. He was waiting for it, when towards

<sup>1</sup> This is one example among many which prove that the Germans did not respect the Convention of Geneva.

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5 p.m. a lieutenant of cuirassiers arrived on horseback followed by his men. He was making a reconnaissance, but he put himself entirely at the disposal of the commander of the 77th.

“ Can I be of any service ? ”

“ I must absolutely have a gun brought up,” replied the colonel. “ If you could go and bring it forward ? ”

“ I will make it my first duty,” replied the lieutenant.

And he set off at once. A few minutes later the team galloped up ; the gun was then carried forward 400 metres by the men and placed facing the gate of the castle. Acting on the same inspiration, Colonel Eon had two guns of the Naud battery carried up by the 2nd battalion to the south of the castle, on the right of the Broyes road. As it was a cloudy evening and the light was fading, the enemy did not observe this manoeuvre. Explosive shells now reached the out-buildings and set them on fire. It was after this, apparently, that the German retreat was sounded ; some of our men heard it. At 6.30 a second attack was carefully prepared, to be launched on an enemy who had no suspicion that it was impending, and at seven o'clock exactly, Colonel Lestoquoi, Major de Courson de la Villeneuve, and Captain Béziers-la-Fosse entered the gate of the castle without a shot having been fired. The enemy had abandoned the position, leaving many dead on the paths round the castle, in the garden, and in the park.

There were some hand-to-hand encounters in the village, which our men proceeded to clear out. Many



prisoners were taken. The 2nd battalion was ordered to bivouac in the woods to the right of the Broyes road, where it spent the night in the rain. The 3rd battalion took up its quarters in the great court of the castle ; the men made their coffee over fires built with the small wooden beams of the outhouses, the stable, and garage, where the skeleton of an automobile was found beneath the debris. The men talked and joked. The bright light of these burning buildings and the hopes raised by the preparation of a meal cheered them. And had they not been told that early to-morrow morning the food supply would arrive, bread and fresh meat ?

In the great salon the remains of a meal were found on the tables—uncorked bottles, half-filled glasses of champagne. Colonel Lestoquoi assembled all the remaining officers of his staff in this salon, on the walls of which the flag of the 77th was spread out. The success of the regiment must be acclaimed. But there were many losses to deplore—and what losses !

“ I wish only for one thing,” he said in closing, his voice thick with emotion ; “ that I may die as fine a death as de Beaufort, as Montesquieu ; that I may die as they did, facing the enemy in victory.” And he sent the following laconic message to General Humbert :

“ I hold the village and castle of Mondement. I will remain here over-night.”

It was a night of pitch darkness, without stars, with big, heavy clouds. In the principal avenue, where the flames of the burning outhouses cast an angry glow over the sky, giving it an almost theatrical effect, Colonel

Eon, the commander of the 36th brigade, dictated his report by torch-light. The stretcher-bearers searched all round the castle to pick up the wounded. Every stretcher party was preceded by a lantern-bearer. By the fugitive gleams of these pale lights one saw men of the 2nd battalion lying on the ground wounded and unconscious. Ah! their stupefaction to find that they had come living out of that hell; their sorrow on learning how many of their comrades, how many of their chiefs had fallen! Through the black darkness of the night one could hear the stretcher-bearers calling, "No more wounded?" And the lanterns came and went and crossed each other's paths, these lanterns whose pale light shone on horribly mutilated bodies, mangled trees, shell holes (from one of these craters a little dog, lying down at the foot, looked at us without moving as we passed). We recovered the body of Major de Beaufort, of Captain de Montesquieu and many others. Major de Beaufort had a smile on his face; he was not disfigured; there was only a little blood on his right eyebrow, and his red *képi* with its four gold stripes was torn. A dreadful smell of putrefaction spread all over the place from the bodies of the poor dead horses. And what a scene that was inside the castle! One entered the great salon through the picture gallery. Lamps had been lit in the four corners. The wounded were lying everywhere—on the cushions, the sofas, the beautifully-embroidered curtains, among the priceless furniture, the tapestries, the *bibelots*, the art treasures; while from the walls the ancestors in full evening dress and wigs looked



THE FANION OF THE 2ND

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Baur, of the Morocco division, which the Germans had failed to bury, was found in a room. All night through till dawn the French guns continued to fire at long intervals.

The next morning, under a fine rain which ceased about ten o'clock, the men were occupied in digging graves. Major de Beaufort and Captain de Montequieu were buried in the village cemetery. The colours of the 77th, with a picket, rendered the last honours. Lieutenant Coureau drew a plan on the left wall of the church to indicate the position of the graves. All morning the soldiers pulled flowers in the gardens, and made bouquets and crowns with which they lined the big graves in which they laid their heroic comrades.

Towards midday the 77th left Mondement. That evening they were quartered at Fère-Champenoise,<sup>1</sup> and on the morning of the 11th they set out in pursuit of the enemy.

The whole regiment was mentioned in the army order for its brilliant conduct on Sept. 9.

ÉLIE CHAMARD.

Another participator in this affair, Jules Brosset, who was then a sergeant of the 8th half-section of the 77th company of the 77th, has written to say that the name of Second-Lieutenant Boulin<sup>2</sup> should be added

<sup>1</sup> The searchlights were directed on the tops of the houses to let us see the Boches who were trying to escape over the roofs.

<sup>2</sup> It is in error, no doubt, and because his promotion was so recent, that he is described as *Adjutant* on his tombstone in the cemetery at Mondement. Another error in the same cemetery is the misspelling of the name of Sergeant Atlé, which is given as Athé.

to the list of officers and non-commissioned officers who fell at Mondement, killed during the first charge, at the side of Major de Beaufort. Also Sergeant Queneau, who was killed that morning in the wood.

"What I remember most distinctly about that day," adds Sergeant Brosset, "was when Captain Villers reassembled us after the first charge. We proceeded on patrol towards the northern boundary of the Allemant wood, to form a screen so that the guns might be moved forward unperceived by the enemy. We were lying flat on the leaves, for the shells were passing very low. At the third hit, the left tower, which faced us, was set on fire, and soon the whole left wing was in flames. Darkness had nearly closed in. Hardly had the fire of the 75's died away, when the whole 3rd battalion passed by us at the charge. Then, without orders, we also rushed forward; when we arrived at the other side of the castle, and drew breath, there was not one unwounded German left in the place. The next day we buried our dead, and on their tomb, which was nearly opposite the gate of the castle on the other side of the road, we laid a crown of dahlias and chrysanthemums, gathered from the flower-border of the inner court. . . . The leader of my section that day was Lieutenant Renault, who was to fall at Zonnebeke, near Ypres, two months later."

NOZAY, MORAINS, AND THE GRAVE OF  
SERGEANT GUERRE

The different spellings of certain names on our staff maps, and on the maps of the Ministry of the Interior, has led to confusion and sometimes to duplication very prejudicial to the clearness of facts. That accounts for the confusion as to the recapture of the farm of Hazel, or the farm of Mont-Août, or the farm of Nozay or Nozet, situated near Mont-Août.

"They are all the same place," writes the learned Dr. Plicot of Fère-Champenoise. "It is the farm situated on Hill 118. Longnon's *Dictionnaire topographique de la Marne* (1891) says on p. 204: 'Nozay, farm, commune of Connantre; Mill of Nozay (1835, staff map); Nozet (1860, Cornet-Paulus); Nozait (1862, Guérard, p. 224).' It is easy to understand, after noticing the differences of all these maps, that the form 'Ferme de Hozet' given on the staff maps of 1889 is an orthographical error. The word should be written Nozay. Longnon, a great authority, approves this version. In the cantonal atlas of the Marne (1877) one finds on Hill 118 'F<sup>e</sup> Nozet.' While we are on the subject of the staff maps and the way they spell the names of places, I notice that they indicate to the north of Fère-Champenoise, 'Morains-le-Petit.' It should be simply, as Longnon puts it, 'Morains.' For there is no Morains-le-Grand. I suppose that the first name is due to the confusion which has arisen between the name of the village of Morains and that

of the stream which has its source there : the Petit-Morain."

Dr. Plicot finishes his letter by a communication about the grave of Sergeant Guerre, which has been identified, thanks to the researches of M. Lucien Landréat, marble-cutter and municipal councillor, who remained at his post during the German occupation, and who is "the one man in Fère who knows all the military graves in that neighbourhood." The plate which marks this grave still bears the inscription, "Sergeant-major X . . ., of the 66th of the line," but there is no doubt, after the evidence of Dr. Plicot and M. Landréat, that it is the grave of Sergeant Guerre. It bears the number 640, and is situated near the Vaure, between the Haute-Rochelle and Basse-Rochelle roads, one kilometre and a half from the church of Fère.

#### AVIATION IN FOCH'S ARMY

We borrow the following extract of Brindejone des Moulinais' *Journal de bord* from the *Guerre Aérienne*. It refers to the period from the 4th to the 10th Sept., and throws some light on the part played by aviation in the centre of our army.

Sept. 4. — Reconnaissance, Rethel-Reims. Came down at Tours-sur-Marne to report to General Foch; then at Heitz-le-Maurupt, to the staff of Langle de Cary.

Second reconnaissance on Somme-Suipe and

Cuperly ; landed at Saint-Dizier. To-day's was the maximum speed of retreat attained in one day. How far are we to retreat ? To the Loire, some say, to the Central *Massif*, according to others. It is terrible !

*Sept. 5.*—Reconnaissance, Saint-Dizier, Reims, Fismes, Bergères-les-Vertus, where we descended to report to General Foch, who is in command, it is said, of three army corps, forming an army which is from this time to come between us and the army of Franchet d'Espérey on our left. We saw four German army corps to-day marching in order of battle across the camp of Chalons and the neighbourhood of Reims. What feelings it aroused ! but what a splendid spectacle it was ! I dropped two bombs on a large bivouac and saw dense smoke rising from the very centre of it. The bombs had gone home. We then went on to Saint-Rémy-en-Bouzemont near Vitry-le-François, where we descended ; we lunched off a crust of bread, then went on to Brienne-le-Château.

I heard afterwards that my bombs had wounded a captain and three men.

*Sept. 6.*—Reconnaissance on Brienne, Chalons, Vertus ; alighted at Pargny to give our information to General Foch. The Germans occupy Chalons and the district of Ay. One division has its headquarters already at Vertus.

*Sept. 7.*—Reconnaissance on Vitry and Chalons. Second flight to drop bombs.

*Sept. 8.*—Reconnaissance on Vitry and Chalons. We were told off to watch the arrival of enemy reinforcements on the Chalons highroads ; other machines



were to watch the east of Vitry-le-François. The battle was raging below, following a line decidedly east and west. To the right this line seemed to incline towards the north-east of Verdun. To the west, it passed by Sompuis and inclined towards the Marshes of Saint-Gond.

A second flight with twenty-three shells : I dropped them on the heavy batteries to the east of Vitry : then I disturbed an artillery brigade (*echelons of ravitaillement*), which scattered in every sense, but reassembled as soon as I had gone. I discovered the positions of twenty-four guns on the line to the west of Vitry. I marked them on the map at 1/80000, and informed the corps concerned.

*Sept. 9.*—Reconnaissance, Chalons : discovered new batteries. I alighted at Meix-Tiercelin by the XVIIth corps, which had just changed its general. It is now commanded by General Dumas.

Second reconnaissance on Mailly and Sommesous.

*Sept. 10.*—Reconnaissance as usual with Captain Pujo. He had also noticed that on our left (4th army), towards the camp of Mailly, there were no forces opposing us. There was a gap, a space between the two German armies, with only some cavalry a long way behind. Our division of cavalry was in the camp at Mailly. The obvious thing was for us to drive in a division or a corps if possible. General Dubois was charged with this task. We watched closely for the moment when this movement could be effected without being noticed by the enemy, and we flew over Sompuis, Mailly, Sommesous, Lenharrée, Coole, in

spite of heavy clouds. And we never saw any German reserves.

Second reconnaissance with Captain Thiron. We alighted beside the XXIst corps, informing them as to the positions of batteries and troops, telling them also that our troops were too far in the rear, that our guns did not carry far enough, and that there were no troops on our left.

While we were at Saint-Ouen, the general sent us a message that the cavalry had signalled an enemy division in front of him. We told him that that was not the case. But we proposed to make another reconnaissance. We set off, saw a French infantry division which was marching slowly forward, sustained by the artillery. We also saw the French cavalry division in the camp at Mailly. We flew low down, for it was late. No Germans. We returned to carry our information to Saint-Ouen. We had made three reconnoissances. Returned to Brienne for the night.

BRINDEJONC DES MOULINAIS.

### THE BATTLE-FIELD OF NORMÉE

*Communicated by Élie Chamard*

Alphonse Constant, a private soldier, who at the time of the battle of the Marne belonged to the 66th, gave me the following account of his experiences :

“ On that tragic night of Sept. 7, we bivouacked in the woods, five kilometres to the north of Fère-Champenoise ; we were in reserve. The tired soldiers

were sleeping confidently, their haversacks serving as pillows, when at dawn, about 3.30, a fusillade, sharp and near, startled every one awake. The captain shouted : ' Fix bayonets ! ' then : ' Down ! Down ! Fire ! ' The Boches were on us, only twenty metres away. One could hardly distinguish them among the fir branches in the pale light of the early morning. What did it all mean ? What had become of our covering troops ? There was a moment's confusion, aggravated by firing on our rear, carried out in error by the foot-soldiers of our 93rd. We were obliged to fall back, that the whole force should not be massacred. The Boches advanced in dense masses and outflanked us on our wings. We crossed a stream. We found units from different regiments, especially from the 32nd infantry. The officers gathered together in consultation. The regiment was surrounded. There was no liaison between the companies. What was to be done ? Majors de Villentrois and Rabuceau, Captains Milhau and Lachouque, decided to attempt to break through. We chose a likely place ; we were massed in a wood beyond which lay a large clearing, and, cost what it might, we were obliged to make our way over it. The men defiled one by one across this clearing. I was hardly half-way over when a bullet in my leg knocked me over suddenly. I tried in vain to get up ; I saw my comrades pass by me one by one to the charge. I understood that they could not carry me away. A terrible thought took possession of me. I should have to die there. Bullets whistled incessantly over my head. I dragged myself along as far as I could to gain

the cover of a bush, but I was still within the zone of fire of the German machine-guns. As I was trying to get under cover, a wounded German a short distance away made me a sign to come nearer. Fearing a ruse, I showed him my rifle, which I had hung on to, and made him understand that he should come to me. He was wounded in the face and thigh. I applied his dressing for him. And with the help of a dictionary I attempted conversation. But the fusillade, which had been resumed, was terrible. Boches arrived running, fixed bayonets in their hands. They signed to us to lie down flat. I heard cries, imprecations, and, after a few moments which seemed like centuries, the fusillade moved further away. Then masses of grey uniforms appeared from every side and spread all over the wood. It was probably about midday. German doctors came towards us. They made us rejoin other wounded French soldiers, whom I was glad to see again. On our asking, 'What are you going to do with us?' the doctor replied in excellent French: 'Your newspapers tell horrible lies. No German soldier ever ill-treated a wounded French soldier.' A few boxes of cigarettes were distributed among us, and a little chocolate which the Germans found for us in the haversacks of the dead, who were lying all over the ground. Then the wounded who were able to walk were led away. The others were left behind. A doctor cried to us, 'Patience! We will come back this evening to fetch you.' . . . Alas! night fell . . . passed slowly away . . . and all the long hours of the next day. In the afternoon Uhlans rode through our wood. More merciful than the

doctors, they dismounted and went to the river to get us some water to drink. Then some German soldiers passed at the gallop. At last stretcher-bearers appeared in sight ; but they could only carry away a few non-commissioned officers from our group. Another night fell, dismally. We passed it in intolerable restlessness. It was very hot. We were hungry. We were thirsty. Fever caused us more suffering even than our wounds. We gave up all hope. A deadly torpor took possession of us. But suddenly—it was about four o'clock—we heard sounds, horses' feet. We opened our eyes. What was our amazement, our joy, to see French chasseurs appearing ! They told us of the retreat of the Germans, of our victory. We at once revived, we were filled with new life. That same evening I was moved to a school-room at Fère-Champenoise."

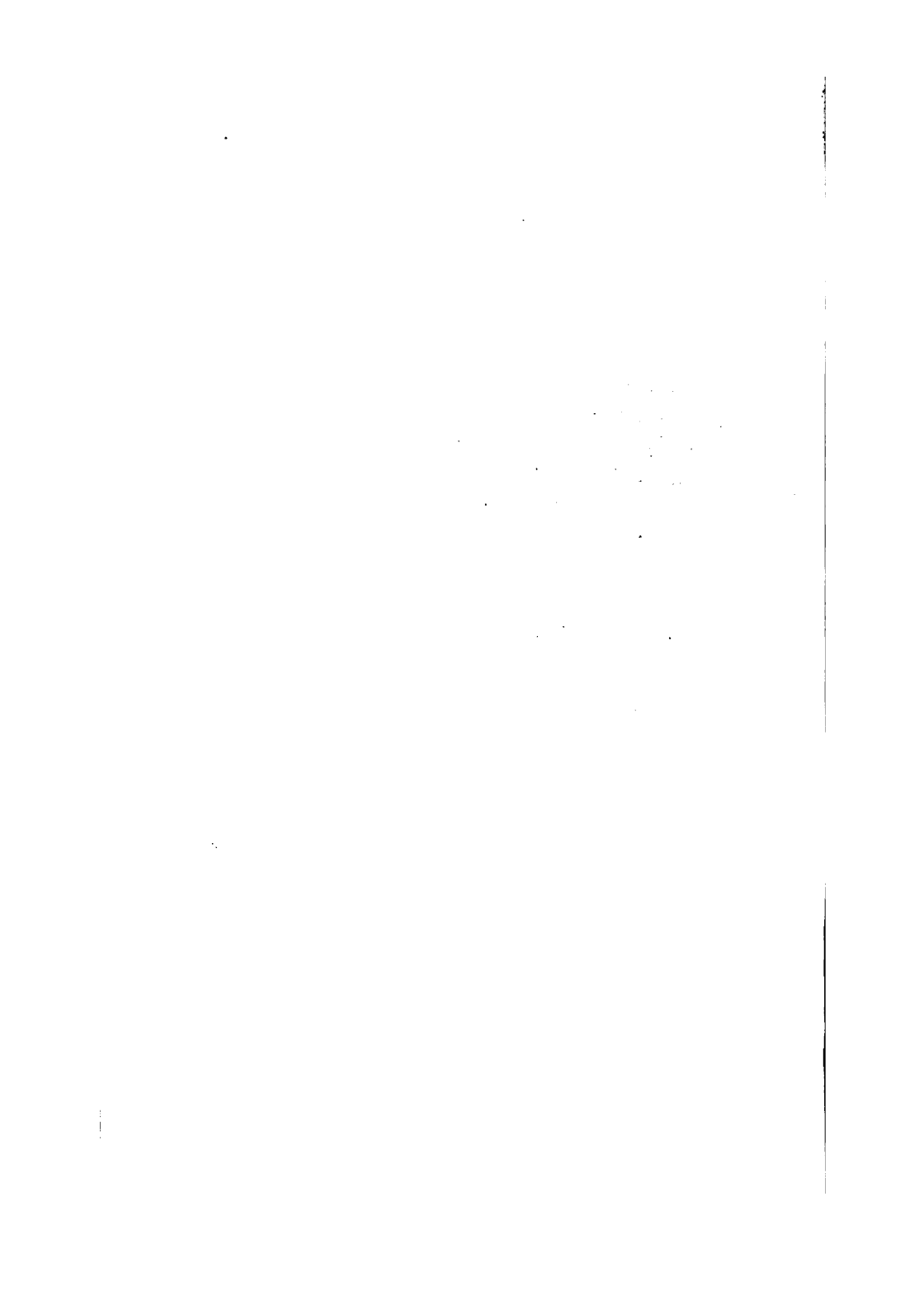
#### THE SURPRISE OF VILLESENEUX

*Communicated by X . . .*

Ever since the previous day the Guards and the Saxons had been retreating. That was the result of Foch's famous flank manœuvre executed by the 42nd division, which Franchet d'Espérey, victorious all along the line since the 7th, had allowed him to move from his left over to his right. The 42nd division was directed towards Connantray, but about midday the 162nd, which formed a brigade with the 151st under the command of Colonel Trouchaud, was stopped on the



REMAINS OF THE GERMAN BATTERY OF 105'S



Normée road by superior enemy forces. The 151st, which was on advance guard on the Vaure near la Fontaine d'Ivoire, immediately sent the Boutain battalion to its aid. Towards two o'clock, wishing to break this resistance, Grossetti, in command of the 42nd division, deployed the whole of his artillery (fifteen batteries) to the north of Fère-Champenoise ; he then ordered his brigadiers to advance in three columns on the line Clamanges-Villeseneux-Soudron : the left column under Colonel Trouchaud with the 162nd ; the central column under Colonel Deville with two battalions of the 151st ; the column on the right under General Krien, with the 94th.

The general headquarters of the division was at Villeseneux.

I was attached to the central group as staff-officer, and I remember that at 5 p.m. Colonel Deville, seized by justifiable anxiety on hearing the guns growling incessantly on his left, asked Colonel Trouchaud if, perhaps, the orders had not been modified.

"Not in the least," replied the commander of the brigade.

After that, farewell to hesitation ; we must go forward.

We set out. It was about 5.30. The sun was sinking fast. A heavy, sickly smell rose from the ground, saturated with blood, a smell which continued to distress us all the evening. Dead and wounded lay all round. When we turned towards Hill 138, we met the Boutain battalion. Like us, it found difficulty in advancing under the fire which searched the fir woods



along the railway line ; and as it was impossible for us to get our waggons across the slope of the line, we decided to go along it as far as the village of Lenharrée, where we expected to meet Krien's column. We did not know that it had been held back at the last moment by Grossetti, who had also sent an order to us to suspend this movement. But under the hail of bullets no estafette, no liaison officer had been able to get near Colonel Deville. Lenharrée, which had been evacuated only a few hours earlier, was full of dead : part of the village was in flames. Everything had been pillaged, destroyed. As he does still to-day, then also the enemy left a desert behind him.

Fir woods and gorse extend all the way from Lenharrée to Villeseneux. One only emerges from one little wood to enter another. Night had fallen, and it was not easy to find our way in the labyrinth of foot-paths—more like tracks than paths—which intersected this clump of trees, full of ambushes and snares.

We had captured a Saxon soldier on the way, a talkative person who seemed only too delighted to be finished with the war. His information led us to believe that the enemy was everywhere in full retreat. And indeed on the road from Normée to Villeseneux we heard a continual coming and going of waggons. But the cavalry patrols which we had sent out to left and right had not succeeded in coming in contact with the outposts of the 162nd or the 94th, which were supposed to cover our movement. And at all costs the colonel thought it prudent to make certain tactical dispositions to avoid a surprise. We were "progressing"

all the time, but silently, step by step, examining our ground carefully with searchlights.

We arrived in this way at the edge of the Bois du Mont, where the colonel made us halt for an hour. As yet not a single shot had been fired ; the woods we had crossed were empty as far as the enemy was concerned, but we had been so tired before, and this nocturnal journey through fir woods—where every branch might possibly conceal an enemy—had been of such a nerve-racking and anxious nature, that when at last we saw the plain of Villeseneux unfold itself before us, when the great steeple of the parish church came in sight, we heaved a sigh of relief. It must have been about 10.30 at this time. Soon after eleven o'clock the colonel had the bugle sounded, and while the two companies were coming out of the wood, he and Captain Segonne set out at a trot, very rashly, in the direction in which he expected to find our advance guards. They had not gone 200 metres when his orderly was stopped by a German sentinel.

*“ Wer da ? ”*

Shots rang out ; two men fell down : instantaneously the whole horizon was lighted up ; the rat-tat of machine-guns was heard. Bursts of fire descended on our troops from the church tower of Villeseneux. The 151st gathered in companies round its chief, who had not dismounted, and who, to restore order in a moment of surprise and alarm, commanded the regimental call to be sounded. . . .

The effect of that call seemed almost magical. As if by some enchantment the machine-guns were silenced.

At the same time a sound of galloping horses and waggon-wheels was heard from the Normée-Villeseneux road. What was passing along it? Was the enemy decamping?

Not yet, at any rate, for he now began to fire again on the borders of the wood, killing some of our men and one of the colonel's horses. Shells were bursting all round. But were they German shells? The officers of the colonel's staff thought it might perhaps be an error of the 162nd, which had been ordered to occupy Villeseneux before us, and the outposts of which might perhaps be firing on us by mistake, taking us for Germans. The colonel, who still heard the *Wer da!* of the German sentinel ringing in his ears, would not allow himself to be persuaded of this, and wishing to assure himself of the real facts of the case, he turned his horse into the wood, accompanied by a sergeant, and trotted off towards the Normée-Villeseneux road. There at least he would be able to find out the truth. He learnt it almost at once by a volley, which, however, did not cause him to dismount; a patrol which had pushed forward towards another corner of the wood had flung itself on a German post, which was now falling back. . . .

There was no longer any doubt: Villeseneux was certainly in the hands of the enemy, and Colonel Deville, who had ventured forward to the German lines without hearing anything of the Krien column or that of Colonel Trouchaud, thought they must have succeeded in disengaging themselves from the enemy. The order was immediately given to turn back along the road to Lenharrée.

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It was not till the morning, when we again set out for Villeseneux, that everything was explained. Owing to the fact that we had not received Grossetti's counter-order (Grossetti had been unable to break the enemy's resistance on the first attempt as he had hoped), our column had continued to advance alone, and chance having opened a gap, a breach, between Lenharrée and Villeseneux, our column had passed without knowing it through this breach on to the flanks of the German division charged with stopping our 42nd division before Normée.

According to the inhabitants of Villeseneux, this division was commanded by a prince of the blood—probably the too celebrated Eitel.

The rest of the story can be imagined : the enemy thought his front turned, and under the chill breath of fear all his defensive system suddenly crumbled down. During the night, Normée, Soudron, and Villeseneux were silently evacuated. The strategic retreat of yesterday had changed to-day into dismayed flight. . . .

### HOW FOCH CAME TO HAVE TWO BRIDGES TO CROSS THE MARNE

On the morning of September 11, General de Sérévillè, commander of the dragoon brigade, took over the command of the division, General de l'Espée awaiting the Mitry division at Poivres.

Somme-sous was attacked by the 60th reserve division. In order to support it, Sérévillè exerted his efforts

on Soudé-Sainte-Croix, from which he drove out the enemy about ten o'clock. After having collected the various units of the division, with the exception of Saily's brigade which General de l'Espée kept at Poivres till the evening, we marched towards the Marne as quickly as the bad weather, the exhaustion of the horses—which for several days had been falling by the roadside in great numbers from fatigue—and the resistance of the enemy rearguards, formed of groups of laggards; allowed. A fortunate chance willed that the two detachments of the 5th cuirassiers, which the general sent on the evening of the 11th towards the bridges of the Marne, should prevent the Germans from blowing them up. Colonel de Cugnac caused his *chasseurs-à-pied* to attack the bridge of Sogny during the night, just when the German engineers were about to place their explosives. The arrival of Lieutenant Labouchère and his reconnoitring party at the bridge of Chalons, also during the night, caused the cyclist rearguard, which the enemy had left there, to decamp, and when daylight came, melinite petards were found abandoned on the bridge.

The Germans blew up all the other bridges in the neighbourhood, that of Mairy up the river, and those of Matougue and Aulnay down the river.

On the 12th, Lieutenant-Colonel de Gouvello, who commanded the squadrons of the 60th reserve division, learned from a German captain of engineers, who was taken prisoner, that he was on his way to prepare for the destruction of the bridge of Sogny when the attack of the *chasseurs* scattered his men.

## Details of the Battle 215

That was how, thanks to the diligence of General de Séréville, Foch's army had two bridges available to cross the Marne on the morning of the 12th.

### THE SPIES <sup>1</sup>

When war broke out there was probably not one district of France or Belgium which German spies had not explored with the greatest care and precision. The enemy had taken every hypothesis into consideration, and in certain districts, which seemed to lend themselves to decisive engagements, he had made sure that he would not be fighting on unknown ground. Certain channels of the rivers and canals, important strategic centres, had been the object of special attention on his part. He had foreseen everything, even the retreat of his own troops, and had organised to this end, in time of peace, a system of permanent fortifications leading right up to the frontier, of which the quarries of the Soissonais remain to this day the most remarkable example.

In Champagne his network of espionage was especially close round the Marshes of Saint-Gond. That great green marsh, eighteen kilometres in extent, bastioned by massive hills with precipitous cliffs, inspired him with legitimate apprehension. Did he

<sup>1</sup> We think it interesting to reproduce this article taken from a series published in September, 1916, in the *Petit Parisien*. It confirms —too late, alas!—the revelations published by M. Léon Daudet in his *Avant Guerre*, which has the honour and merit of having denounced the peril more than a year before the events of 1914.

picture to himself the rôle these marshes would play in the coming war? He knew, at all events, from history what a formidable barrier they were able to put in the way of invasion; the means of escape, the resources of every sort, even improvised resources, which they could offer for the resistance of invasion.

There was no way of escape from the straight high-road, no possibility of manœuvring in skirmishing order over these muddy depths, which were ready, on the slightest deviation from the road, to engulf the unwary. It was necessary to have conquered in the marshes, to have negotiated their snares, their mysterious footpaths, in order to strike a decisive blow. That demanded an apprenticeship. And it was just this apprenticeship which the enemy staff had imposed on its officers.

Stationed for the most part at Reims, their headquarters, they spread out from there quite naturally to Villevenard, Oyes, Reuves, Morains, Aulnizeux, Saint-Prix, and so on to those villages which commanded the debouches from the marshes. They made no secret of their nationality; they had formed a society, the *German Society of Reims*, which figured still in the year-books of 1914; and they belonged to the most diverse professions; photographers, agents, bankers, agents of the Champagne trade, shopkeepers, and so on, and all without exception were officers. They played their parts so skilfully that they deceived the most suspicious.

Later, after the declaration of war, one went to the other extreme, and saw spies on every side.



GOURGANÇON



1

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For example, nothing will convince the natives of that district that the Anglo-French Society, which was constituted in 1913 under the direction of M. Ph. Richemont for the exploitation of the marshes — nothing will convince the natives that this is not a fictitious society, whose business is anything but to experiment as to the properties of heat contained in the marshes. This society also sent prospectors to Brennilis (Finistère), and entered into negotiations for the acquisition of a piece of land 500 hectares in extent in the marshes of Yunn ; here and there it was proposed to extract sulphate of ammonia from the depths by an electrical process, and to make the residue into briquettes. But, as bad luck would have it, one of the engineers engaged in this work had a foreign accent. It needed nothing more ; he was declared to be a Boche. The *Mairie* of Vaucresson went into the matter, and it is now proved beyond doubt that M. Hanrot was a Frenchman through and through.

But the Germans did not wait till the eve of the war to acquaint themselves with the Marshes of Saint-Gond. Their spies had already swarmed over all the farms of the district. They called themselves Swiss, Luxemburgers, and, disguised in the smock of the shepherd, they pursued their explorations from pasture to pasture. In one of the younger officers of an Uhlan patrol which was making its way towards Saint-Prix, a former employee of the cheese factory of Baye was recognised. At Époye a cowherd, who had been there for five years, disappeared on the first rumours of mobilisation, and reappeared again at the head of a

platoon of German scouts. "Oh, Father So-and-so, you don't remember me? Please give me the key of your cellar, which I wish to pay a little visit." At Damilar it was the same story, except that instead of working under the blouse of a cowherd, the spy appeared in the guise of a travelling clerk. Once when he had come to offer his services, one of his clients had snubbed him, saying, "I have no time. It is Sunday, and I am going to Mass." In Sept. 1914 he returned to sneer at her, his monocle in his eye, clad in his officer's tunic. "Well, Madame X . . ., it is not Sunday to-day. Can we settle up our little business together?" Another spy had, from time immemorial, driven about the country in one of the little Caiffa carriages; he travelled from farm to farm in this little vehicle with his dog, and took orders—and notes. . . . And who did not know the little travelling draper of Reims?

"Here is the seller of coupons, sheap, very sheap!" he would cry, in his execrable German accent. He had a horse and carriage, and travelled all over the country; he was good company, even obsequious, allowing his little carriage to be overturned, allowing one to mock at his vile accent. He said he was an Austrian. He was really a Saxon captain who was killed at Connantre.<sup>1</sup>

There is no end to stories of this sort. Sometimes it was German officers, who, under pretext of introduc-

<sup>1</sup> There must be some mistake here, for the only German officer buried at Connantre was called von Turner and belonged to the Guards.

ing chemical fertilisers to the farms, travelled round the marshes in their motors; sometimes, as at la Verrerie, it was an isolated officer, an amateur sportsman, who installed himself in the neighbourhood of the marshes and stayed all the season to shoot wild duck. And naturally, when he returned to this region, he took a malicious pleasure in making himself known to his dupes.

"Yes! it is I myself. . . . You did not expect to see me, *hein?* . . . Confess that you are silly fools!"<sup>1</sup>

But the most extraordinary story of this sort was that of a good farmer of the neighbourhood of Bannes, whose cows were grazing on the marshes, whence they took flight at the first sound of the guns. He was much distressed when they did not return: the poor beasts had not been milked for three days, and must be suffering agonies. Not expecting to see them again, he began to ascend to Bannes. These parts of the marshes have each their particular name; there is the *Patte-d'Oie*, the *Coin-à-Sophie*, the *Fosse-à-Renaud*, and so on. This farmer was going towards the *Cul-de-Navaille*. Being a man of precaution, he had provided himself with two bottles of claret and a basket of food. But he had counted without his host: in making a *détour* to avoid a German sentry, he came upon a big German officer, seated on the borders of the marsh, gorging himself with sausages. He began by confiscating one of the farmer's bottles; he emptied it at one gulp, wiped his

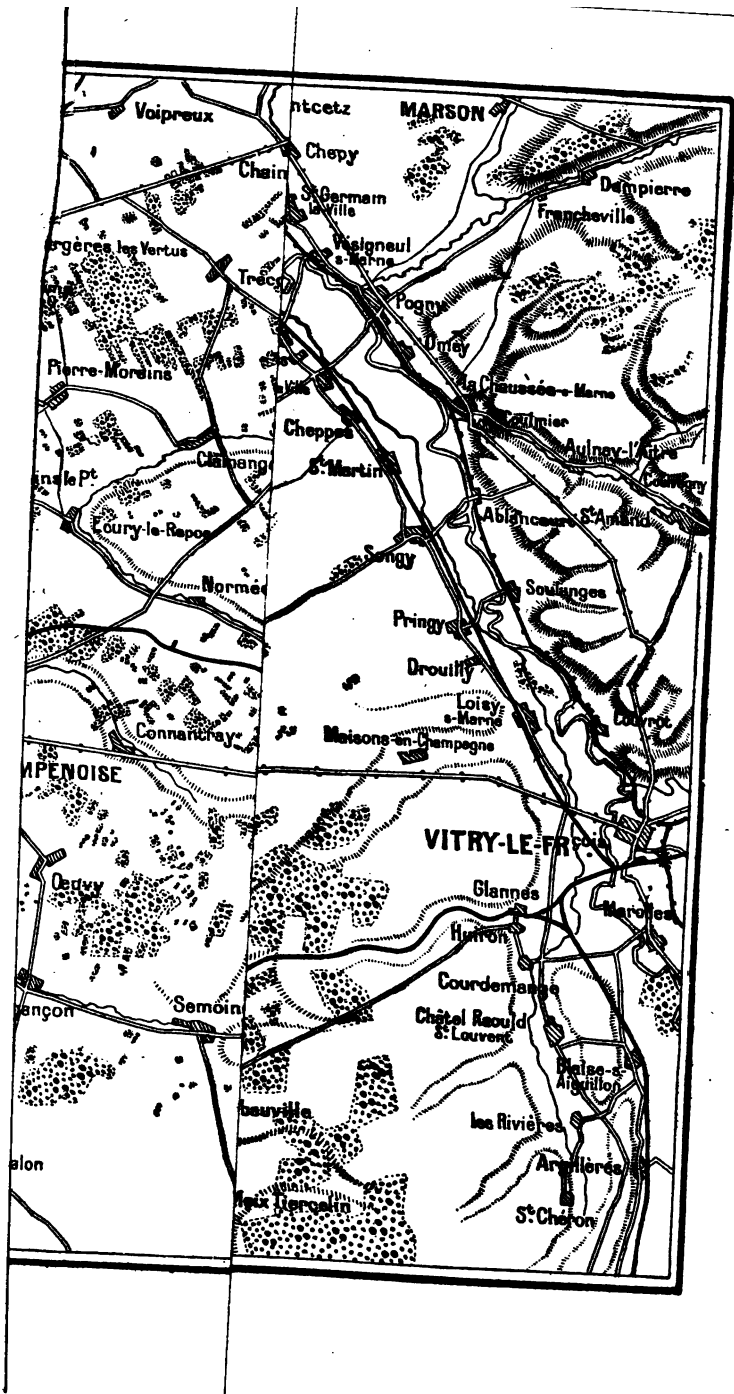
<sup>1</sup> Mme. Lecourt, the proprietress of la Verrerie, tells us that she harboured no German officer before the war, but that this incident took place in another farm near the marshes.

mouth with his hand, and then asked the farmer what he was doing there. The other explained his business, taking the risk of such an explanation.

"Well, my man," replied the officer, in the peculiar dialect of that part of the country, "if you go towards the Cul-de-Navaille, you had better leave the Coin-à-Sophie on your left and go by the Fosse-à-Renaud, because about a hundred metres from here there is an outpost of my men who do not understand French, and who might possibly cause you some annoyance. . . ."

Our good farmer was left open-mouthed with astonishment : a German officer speaking the Champagne dialect and knowing the marshes as well as he knew them himself, if not better ! He has not yet recovered from his amazement.

And the worst of it is that this officer was probably not unique in his accomplishments. For a long time back, owing to their minute inspection of every undulation, every hollow of the ground, the Marshes of Saint-Gond have held no secrets for the Germans ; these scoundrels have sounded all the depths, acquainted themselves with all the paths and tracks. They could have taught the natives a good deal about their own marshes. And if the close examination they made of the marshes did not save them from defeat, it did at least save them from disaster : the marsh, which should have engulfed them at the last, allowed its prey to escape.





THE PONDS OF AUSTERLITZ AND THE MARSHES OF  
SAINT-GOND

My sketch of the battle of the Marshes of Saint-Gond in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and M. Louis Madelin's study of the Victory of the Marne—a study of a general nature and of lofty ideas—which appeared in the following number of the *Revue*, inspired the editor of the *Démocrate de Délemont*, M. A. Lombard, to write the following curious and interesting observations on the history of the Ponds of Austerlitz.

“The history of the wars of Napoleon as it is recounted by the historians of to-day,” he writes, “is full of legends. One of the most characteristic and insistent of these is that of the Ponds of Austerlitz.”

(We all remember the episode. The Russians were fleeing in disorder over the frozen ponds of Moenitz and Satschau, when the French guns shattered the ice under their feet and the Russians were drowned by thousands. Napoleon's thirtieth bulletin stated the exact number, 20,000 Russians drowned. Ségur, Marbot, and Serurier were witnesses of this dramatic scene: they give us circumstantial details, and explain how the fire of the French guns was effected.)

“But in spite of all that,” writes M. Lombard, “it can no longer be doubted that this story was merely a legend. These ponds, which had supplied the troops with fish on their march to Vienna, were carefully emptied and cleared out after the battle. Some guns which had fallen in with their teams, and the body of



one soldier, were found on the edge of one of them. Nothing at all was found in the other. And the cold had not been so intense as to cover the ponds with ice thick enough to carry men and guns even for an instant. But all that does not prevent even the most serious and weighty manuals from repeating these details, from mentioning long afterwards—as in the *Histoire* of Thiers—the tragic episode of those ponds: ‘Those who escaped the fire of the guns were drowned in the lakes.’

“It is easy to guess why we have recalled this incident; it is because the legend of the Ponds of Austerlitz has been repeated in that of the Marshes of Saint-Gond. The cravings of the imagination are always the same; and if we lived in an epoch less exactly informed, it is certain that the Marshes of Saint-Gond would go down in history as the Tomb of the Prussian Guard. Conscientious historians are endeavouring to destroy this nascent and growing legend. Who knows whether they will succeed? Or whether these marshes of Champagne will not retain their sinister prestige? Already one writer tells us that he has seen these ruthless marshes ‘throw up in their undulations corpses which emerged half out of the clay.’

“In the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of the 1st and 15th September, M. le Goffic and M. Madelin have put this matter in its proper light. The Germans knew the marshes perfectly; moreover the marshes are partly drained. The German retreat was effected after the capture of the Castle of Mondement by the French, on the night of Sept. 9, and the retreat was made over

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good roads. The Germans lost men and material certainly, but the marshes did not swallow them up.

“Historians will have one argument the more to justify their mistrust, with which they are reproached, regarding human evidence. But the retreat of the Guard was certainly the decisive moment of the battle, perhaps of the war. ‘That which was swallowed up in the marshes, that which foundered definitely in their green depths, was more than a few crack battalions—it was the prestige of the German army and of its pretended invincibility.’

“With much more justice than the Ponds of Austerlitz, the Marshes of Champagne deserve to be remembered by the people. On this occasion, at least, the reality is finer than the legend.”

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